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Transcending chaos:

Spirituality and coping in post-earthquake Canterbury, New Zealand

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A thesis
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Susan Elizabeth Young

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Abstract of a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Transcending chaos: Spirituality and coping in post-earthquake Canterbury, New Zealand

by

Susan Elizabeth Young

When an "I thought I was going to die quake" occurs amidst four additional major earthquakes and 15,000 aftershocks during a sixteen-month period, it challenges people's ability to cope and recover. Residents of Canterbury, New Zealand endured this extended, chaotic state in 2010/11; and continue to deal with lingering effects on their devastated central city, Christchurch. Stress and coping theory suggests that finding meaning in such situations can help people recover, and that religion and spirituality often play a role in post-disaster resilience. Despite this, there is very little research literature examining this phenomenon and even less that considers spirituality separate from religion. This research focuses on this underrepresented area by considering the personal spiritual or meaningful experiences of people in post-earthquake Canterbury. Data from sixteen in-depth, minimally directed interviews were thematically analyzed to understand each individual's meaning construction and coping/recovery process and identify connective themes and patterns amongst their experiences. Four core elements of acceptance, clarity and choice, connection, and transcendence emerged from the thematic analysis to conceptualize a model of transcendent coping. Transcendent coping represents an additional type of coping in the transactional model of stress and coping, which serves to support the previous denoted problem-, emotion-, and meaning-focused coping approaches. Transcendent coping offers openness, empowerment, comfort and expansion not necessarily reliant upon theistic or religious beliefs and practices. Rather, this secular spiritual coping is inherent in everyday, mundane practices such as being in the moment, aligning to and acting from personal

values, connecting to that and those who bring comfort, and experiencing transcendence in moments of awe and expansion. This research contributes to the growing interest in spirituality as an important facet of human nature that can support wellbeing in the face of stress.

Keywords: Earthquakes, Christchurch, Meaning, Coping, Spirituality, Transcendence, New Zealand, Stress.

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Finally, to the charming little campus at Lincoln University. Despite earthquake repairs and building construction, the joy of encountering amazing flowers, stately trees, and abundant birdsong, never failed to lift my spirits.

It is on that uplifted note, I wish to dedicate this work to all those coping with trauma, in particular, the Muslim community in Christchurch. The beautiful souls who died in the mosque shootings on March 15, 2019, while lovingly participating in their community, are angels of light. The world does not remember the hateful violence of that day - it embraces the love that resulted.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."

Leonard Cohen

Imagine watching cracks run up the office walls around you as the downtown building you are in shakes during a second, unexpected earthquake; or, sitting daily with wide cracks in your unrepaired suburban rental home for five years after the major shakes have stopped. These are two examples of the cracking that residents of Canterbury, New Zealand endured during and after the earthquake sequence of 2010/11. Yet, large-scale disasters such as these, Fritz (1996) suggests, can and do produce mentally healthy conditions.

Previous researchers have concluded that many people use religion or spirituality when dealing with difficult life situations (Gall et al., 2005; Ironson & Kremer, 2011; Lancaster & Palframan, 2009; O'Rourke et al., 2008; Ramsay & Manderson, 2011; Sibley & Bulbulia, 2012; Stewart, 2011). The stress and coping literature suggests that meaning and spirituality are often used in coping particularly when faced with ongoing, uncontrollable stress (Folkman, 2010; Gall et al., 2005; Park, 2010; Park, 2017; Park & Folkman, 1997). While literature on religious coping is growing steadily (Pargament, 2012), there is very little research that looks at spirituality as separate from religion, particularly within disaster recovery (Park, 2016; Shing et al., 2016).

With over thirty years of personal study in wellness and spirituality, and a ten-year connection to the Canterbury area of New Zealand, I wondered if spirituality could or did, play a role in recovery after the 2010/11 earthquakes. The purpose of this research, therefore, was to explore the nature of people's personal spiritual or meaningful experiences during or since the earthquakes, and how these may be associated with their coping and recovery.

While many people have spiritual experiences, contemporary research has found they often struggle to describe them (Hawker, 2000; Hay & Morisy, 1985; Pearson, 2014). When trying

to discuss their transcendent experiences, people find the language inadequate, feeling misunderstood when using religious terms. Consequently, they may resort to silence about these significant experiences. The aim of this research is to help address this reticence by inviting people to share their spiritual experiences; and, contribute to the scholarly study of the role of spirituality in coping.

1.1 Context

This section will provide the context of this study, namely the Canterbury Earthquake Sequence that spanned roughly sixteen months, from September 2010 to December 2011. I will show that the distinctive characteristics of this disaster sequence created an extreme and unusual environment (EUE) for the Cantabrian people.

1.1.1 Canterbury Earthquake Sequence

On 4 September 2010, the Canterbury region of New Zealand experienced the first of five major seismic events within a year and a half that would result in a drastically changed City of Christchurch and surrounding area. The first earthquake (M7.1) struck in the early morning hours resulting in damage to land and buildings, but no loss of life. Repeated strong aftershocks continuously occurred, including a major aftershock on 26 December 2010 (M5.1), a devastating second earthquake on 22 February 2011 (M6.3), and major aftershocks on 13 June 2011 (M6.0) and 23 December 2011 (M5.8 and 5.9). This unnerving sequence caused further widespread damage, including 185 deaths and over 6,000 injuries (Potter et al., 2015).

Parts of the city of Christchurch and other areas of Canterbury certainly were physically altered in the aftermath of the earthquake sequence. In addition to two buildings collapsing in the downtown core, and widespread structural and land damage elsewhere, significant amounts of liquefaction (a process whereby solid ground transforms into liquid mud) covered large parts of the city and areas near water (McColl & Burkle, 2013). Residents also had to contend with over 15,000 aftershocks in the region (Greaves et al., 2015). More distressing, however, was the reality that 80% of Christchurch's downtown core had been destroyed or significantly altered, creating an ongoing feeling of disorientation and disruption (Thornley et al., 2015).

Cutter et al. (2008) considered resilience in communities when confronted with a hazardous event. The characteristics of the hazard, such as frequency, duration, intensity, magnitude and rate of onset, are all measured against the community's ability to respond (Cutter et al., 2008). When the sum of these factors outweighs the community's ability to cope, it is deemed a disaster. This was certainly the case in Christchurch, prompting the declaration of the first New Zealand State of Emergency.

The following pictures portray some of the damage inflicted upon the City of Christchurch and area, clearly demonstrating various aftereffects of the earthquakes and underscoring the scope of the disaster. The images show variations of destruction ranging from one of the collapsed corporate buildings, a private home, the challenge of liquefaction, the damage to iconic religious buildings, to the effects on the railway system. The number of photos are meant to suggest the ongoing feeling Cantabrians had of seemingly never-ending earthquake activity and effects.

Figure 1: Pyne Gould Building, Christchurch (Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pyne_Gould_Building_destroyed_by_earthquake,_Christchurch,_New_Zealand_-_20110224.jpg Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license)

Figure 2: Bealey Avenue in Christchurch (Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:80_Bealey_Avenue_after_earthquake.jpg Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 license)

Figure 3: Liquefaction, Christchurch (Source: Andy Miah, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic)

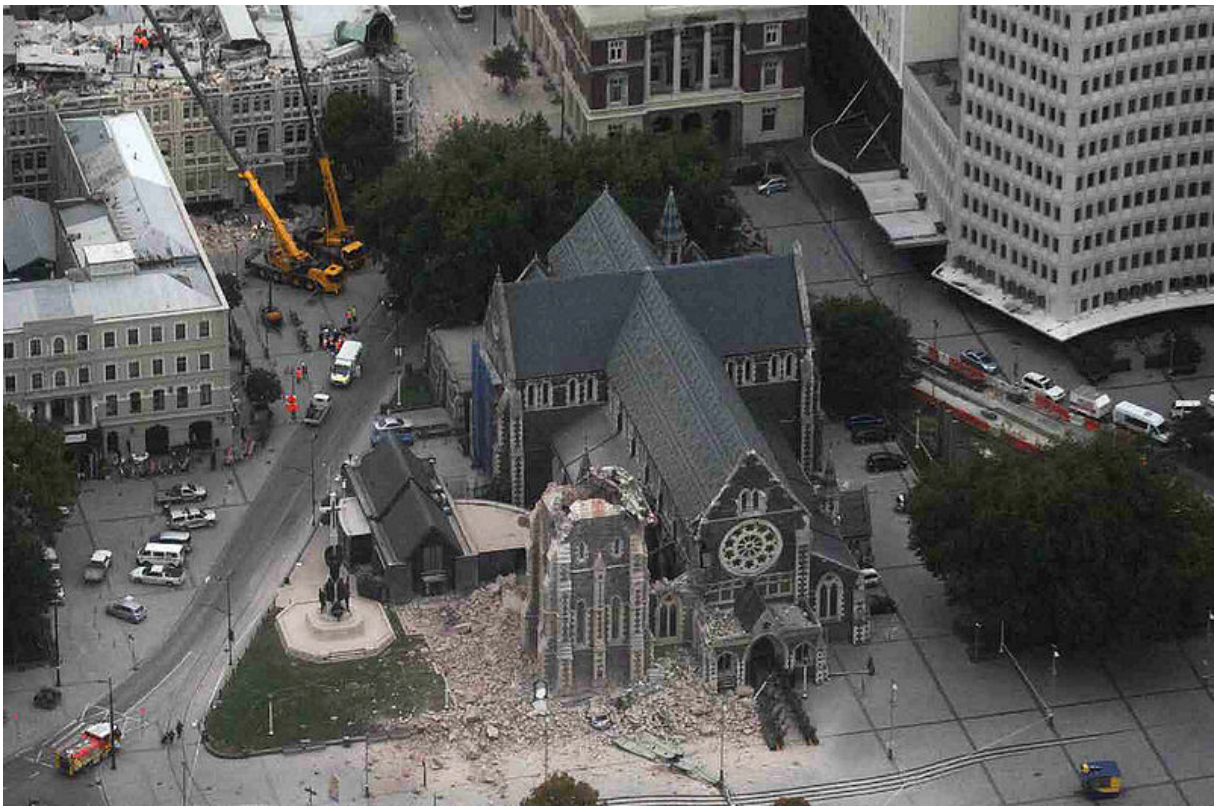

Figure 4: Christchurch Cathedral in Cathedral Square (Source: https://nl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:ChristChurch_Cathedral_-_2011_earthquake_damage.jpg Creative Commons license Attribution 2.0 Generic)

Figure 5: Catholic Cathedral in Christchurch (Source: https://serc.carleton.edu/details/images/108210.html Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license http:/ /creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/)

Figure 6: Kaiapoi Railway Lines
(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Buckled_train_tracks_near_Kaiapoi.jpg
Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license)

This research took place in 2017 – seven years after the beginning of the earthquake sequence and during the ongoing, prolonged recovery of the city of Christchurch and surrounding areas of Canterbury.

1.1.2 Extreme and Unusual Environments

The criteria for an "Extreme and Unusual Environment" (EUE) is that of survivability and comparison to the norm (Suedfeld, 1987). Mountain climbing, Antarctic work, space flight and solo sailing are all examples of EUE's that are experienced by choice. They involve physical danger that can be mitigated by special equipment, supplies and planning, and occur in settings that are novel; definitely outside the realm of normal everyday experience.

Earthquakes represent another kind of EUE – an involuntary choice dictated by nature, not human preference. The Canterbury earthquake sequence would definitely qualify as an EUE by virtue of Suedfeld's (1987) description as "environments during and immediately after drastic disruption of their normal attributes that involve a high degree of danger and a major

alteration in physical characteristics (e.g., familiar and safe environments transformed by earthquake, hurricane or battle) (p. 864).

The Christchurch EUE had several distinguishing features. Firstly, there was surprise – Christchurch was not considered as high an earthquake risk as other areas of the country (Potter et al., 2015). Then, there was the intensity – ground acceleration was 2.2 times the force of gravity, making it one of the most intense earthquakes in the world (McColl & Burkle, 2013). Third, was the sequence – several major seismic events happening close together, interspersed by over 15,000 aftershocks, which constantly interrupted the recovery process. Finally, there was the urban impact of restructuring a major, modern city of 370,000 people (Thornley et al., 2015).

Despite several years' time lapse since this disaster, there is some evidence that Cantabrians remain uneasy. A 14 February 2016 seismic event, measuring 5.7, caused many people in the Christchurch area to feel re-traumatized – shaken both physically and psychologically. A local resident recorded the following reaction on her blog:

> *I was upset, yes, but more than that I was completely taken aback by my physical reaction to what I knew was not a particularly destructive seismic event. The rational part of my brain understands how aftershocks work, what to expect, and how they vary in destructiveness. . . But my body, even though it's had nearly 4 years of no significant aftershocks, knew differently. It kicked straight into high anxiety, flight or fight, do or die mode. (Tamaira, 2016)*

This eloquent blog post went on to write of the lingering effects of earthquake trauma in Christchurch. It underlined the hard work involved in recovering from such an event. O'Rourke et al. (2008) recognize the changed state trauma can wreak, stating that "traumas call into question the essential meaning construction that people have made of their lives, and create a potentially irrevocable break between the individual's experience pre-trauma and post-trauma by shattering the sense of coherence and meaning that had previously existed" (p. 727).

This Canterbury Earthquake Sequence was clearly an "Extreme and Unusual Environment". The five major seismic events, occurring roughly six months apart, created a damage-rebuild

repeat pattern that held residents in an on-going, unpredictable and largely uncontrollable situation.

1.2 Research Aim and Questions

The purpose of this research is to explore the possible role of spirituality within coping after a trauma such as the Canterbury Earthquake Sequence through the narratives of sixteen people who lived in Canterbury and experienced some or all of the earthquakes. Considering the content and function of the study participants' personal spiritual or meaningful experiences will increase understanding of the extent to which spirituality can be a tool for coping. The aim of this study is to explore this under-researched area through the following questions:

1) What is the nature of any personal spiritual or meaningful experiences people may have had during or since the earthquakes beginning on September 4, 2010?

2) How are these experiences associated with people's coping and recovery?

1.3 Research Approach

This study employed qualitative research. Instead of formulating *a priori* themes and using scales to measure specific components of spirituality, I chose a more phenomenological approach. Sixteen participants were recruited and non-directed interviews conducted to elicit their stories of spiritual or meaningful experiences in their coping and recovery from the earthquakes. I personally transcribed the interviews and, through repeated readings of the transcripts, created individual vignette stories for each of the participants. Presenting the data from the interviews in this narrative form deepened my understanding of the participants' experiences and facilitated the thematic analysis which outlined four core elements of the nature and function of spiritual coping. These elements formed the concept of transcendent coping that serves as an addition to the existing stress and coping framework identified in the literature.

1.4 Organization of the Thesis

After setting the context for this research in this introduction, the thesis contains five more chapters. Chapter Two reviews the literature within three relevant streams of spirituality, contemporary psychology, and, stress and coping theory. Chapter Three outlines the

methods of narrative inquiry and thematic analysis used to implement the qualitative study. Chapter Four presents the results - first as individual vignettes for each of the sixteen participants, followed by an analysis of the core elements that emerged across the set of narratives. The discussion in Chapter Five considers the model of coping that includes transcendent coping, which synthesizes the literature and theoretical influences, using the metaphor of a braided river. Implications and limitations round out this chapter, followed by the Conclusions for the study in Chapter Six.

1.5 Personal Reflection

In keeping with the phenomenological and narrative nature of this qualitative study, I will relate a story of my own that, unbeknownst to me at the time, planted the seeds of this PhD research.

On a lazy Sunday afternoon in May of 2015, my husband and I got into our car after popping into the local garden centre. We were about to drive off when we caught the lead-in to an intriguing interview on public radio with author, Patricia Pearson, on her book "Opening Heaven's Door: What the Dying May be Trying to Tell Us About Where They're Going**"** (Pearson, 2015)**.** My husband switched off the car ignition and we sat in the sun listening for the next forty-five minutes.

This sceptical journalist talked about the out-of-the-normal-range of experiences that occurred after the deaths of both her sister and father within days of each other, and how she went on to research others' similar spiritual experiences. A comment she made to the interviewer caused me to put my hand to my heart as tears welled up. Pearson stated that several of the participants simply stopped talking about their spiritual experiences and shut them away, because it was impossible for them to find the right words to explain how significant they were. It saddened me that people felt they had to bury a transcendent experience (that remained salient even decades later), instead of using it to benefit their life and possibly others'. Inspired by Pearson's work, I vowed to keep pursuing my passion of writing about spirituality, in the hope of developing language and accessibility around the topic. Analysing participants' experiences to understand transcendent coping has allowed me to open the door to more research and conversations on spirituality as an important component in managing everyday life.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field.

I'll meet you there."

Rumi

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of spirituality within coping after the 2010/11 Canterbury earthquake sequence by eliciting narratives from sixteen people regarding their personal spiritual or meaningful experiences in post-earthquake recovery. To understand the nature of the spiritual experiences and their association with coping, the literature focuses on three main streams: spirituality, contemporary psychology, and stress and coping. These three areas outline the current understanding of spirituality separated as much as possible from religion, while also situating the research within aspects of psychology that focus on positive approaches to managing stress.

Prolonged stressful situations and traumas require people to use every means of coping available to them to recover, which may include spirituality. However, spirituality is difficult to define and has seldom been studied separate from religion. To facilitate understanding of this concept, I review spirituality versus religion, especially within the New Zealand context; and consider definitions of spirituality, transcendence, and spiritual experiences. Since this study is concerned with personal spirituality that is not necessarily connected to religion or a theistic outlook, I have narrowed the scope of literature to that which explores spirituality from this primarily non-religious perspective.

Literature from humanistic and transpersonal psychology, as related pre-cursors to positive psychology, offer a theoretical framework in which to consider spirituality. The interest in positive psychological functioning in the field of psychology, was led by humanist psychologists in the 1960's, and extended by researchers such as Ryff (1989) who recognised the lack of research that considered these aspects of well-being. This opening in the field continued with the establishment of positive psychology in 2000 that initially focused on happiness, but has since evolved to attend to meaning. This expanded psychology is now

open to previously neglected topics such as spirituality. I suggest that aspects within positive psychology theories operationalize spirituality in everyday lives, supporting the view of spirituality as a valuable character strength that could enhance coping.

The third relevant topic considers the stress and coping literature and how spirituality may exist within it. The updated Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Folkman, 1997) delineates three ways of coping, one of which focuses on meaning during prolonged, low-control, stressful situations. The emphasis on positive emotions and meaning within the coping process addresses critiques of the model, which found the original conceptualization of problem- and emotion-focused coping too narrow (Biggs et al., 2017). The inclusion of meaning-focused coping is particularly relevant to the stressful environment that ensued after the earthquakes, which involved all three ways of coping in the aftermath of the disaster. This revised model provides a beginning framework that may be extended to specifically consider spirituality or transcendence in the coping process.

Spirituality has been noted as a significant domain by Tedeschi & Calhoun (2006) in their work on post-traumatic growth, and certainly could be seen as relevant to some of the participant's experiences in this study. However, the focus and value of this PhD research lies in its exploration of the middle realm between post-traumatic stress and post-traumatic growth. It is the immediacy of coping and the possible role of spirituality as a tool in the process of dealing with the earthquake stress that is highlighted in the chosen literature. That is, the focus is less on the long-term outcome (such as post-traumatic growth) and more on the process of responding to and coping with the effects of a disaster.

2.1 Spirituality

Spirituality is an unpopular subject in traditional academic study and is often presented as an adjunct to religion as a means of legitimizing its study or capitalizing on the growing popular interest in the subject. Walach (2017) goes so far as to bluntly call spirituality a taboo subject within academia, a sentiment borne out with the difficulty I encountered in recruiting participants for the project and in the polarized reactions of academics and the general public to the topic; i.e., either polite lack of interest, or excitement and immediate engagement.

Part of the discomfort lies in not being able to clearly and conclusively define spirituality, despite decades of attempts to do so. In 1997, researchers in the psychology of religion set out to "unfuzzy the fuzzy" by defining the constructs of religion and spirituality, but suggested, in the end, that religion remain the dominant field of scientific study based on its historic longevity and stability (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Scholars within the Psychology of Religion have since moved to acknowledge the importance of spirituality, now including it in titles such as the *Handbook of Religion and Spirituality*, but still highlighting its connection to religion (Paloutzian & Park, 2005, 2014), amidst debate over which concept is broader (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). However, the growing popularity of spirituality in its own right is becoming harder to ignore as evidenced by the first publication of the *Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality* (Miller, 2012).

2.1.1 From Religion to Spirituality

Debates within psychology aside, some researchers (Hardy, 1979; Newberg & d'Aquili, 2008) hold that we have evolved or are programmed to believe in something greater than ourselves. For many people, that belief has long resided in religion. One longitudinal study on religion and perceived health in people affected by the Christchurch earthquakes found that religious faith increased, while those who lost faith showed a decline in perceived health. The study concluded that retaining religious faith might assist in recovery after the Canterbury earthquake (Sibley & Bulbulia, 2012).

However, adherence to religious tradition appears to be declining in western countries. The 2010 statistics on world religions from the Pew Research Centre indicated that New Zealand is projected to be one of only three countries in the world by 2050 with a majority population claiming no religious affiliation (Hackett et al., 2015).

While this move away from organized religion is a growing trend, it does not necessarily mean that people have given up on God or something else that they experience as transcendent to their everyday lives. Researchers in many western countries find people still indicate a belief in something spiritual despite professing no religious affiliation (Bahan, 2015; Chandler, 2008; King et al., 2006). Interestingly, a comprehensive study in the United States discovered the expected decline in religious affiliation, no rise in spirituality, but an increase in belief in an after-life (Twenge et al., 2016). Current statistics from the Pew

Research Center in the United States found 54% of American adults consider themselves religious but a larger portion overall (75%), claim they are spiritual (Lipka & Gecewicz, 2017).

A recent study in New Zealand looked at rising spirituality in the face of religious decline. Gendall et al., (2011) found that while only one-third of their sample held strong religious beliefs, over half of all of the participants considered themselves spiritual. This would indicate that spirituality is also important to those who do not follow a religious tradition. Even given this lack of connection overall to formal religion, the majority of the sample held surprisingly positive views of all religions, allowing that religion can offer peacefulness and comfort during difficult times (Gendall et al., 2011).

Recognizing the significance of spirituality within healthcare, Egan et al. (2011) sought to define the concept in their study of New Zealand hospice. Using interviews and surveys from seventy-eight percent of hospices across the country, the research sought to explore patient, family and staff understanding of spirituality. The comprehensive definition they developed attempted to capture the complexity of the subject, stating "spirituality means different things to different people. It may include (a search for): one's ultimate beliefs and values; a sense of meaning and purpose in life; a sense of connectedness; identity and awareness; and for some people, religion. It may be understood at an individual or population level" (p. 321).

While the practice of formal religion may be on the decline, it appears that New Zealanders still see value in having a connection with something greater than themselves. It is this tendency toward both explicit and implicit spirituality that suggests it may be important to explore the question of how this sense of spirituality may be used when facing difficulties in life.

2.1.2 From Spirituality to Transcendence

There are many phrases used when discussing spirituality, such as transcendental reality (James, 1985), cosmic consciousness (Burke, 1901), natural theology (Hardy, 1979), the numinous (Otto, 1958) and, search for the sacred (Hill & Pargament, 2008). To further complicate matters there are two distinct terms – religion and spirituality – that are often used interchangeably in research (frequently written as religion/spirituality). Religion is a much more defined and studied concept usually referring to a belief system that uses formal rituals and practises to connect with God or a Higher Power. Spirituality, on the other hand,

is harder to define. It is concerned more with the personal, experiential aspect of recognizing something greater than our self, which does not necessarily involve a theistic focus.

Elkins et al. (1988) provide an inclusive definition of spirituality saying it is "a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate" (pg. 10).

Another attempt at a comprehensive definition for spirituality was developed through an international consensus process carried out within the health industry, starting with a review of spirituality in palliative care, but then progressing to spirituality and whole person care. Through a series of conferences in the United States, the European Union, and culminating in an international meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, a joint definition was developed that was "broad and inclusive of the many relationships and aspects of spirituality that can be found in different cultures and societies"(Puchalski et al.,, 2014, p. 646). It reads:

> *Spirituality is a dynamic and intrinsic aspect of humanity through which persons seek ultimate meaning, purpose, and transcendence, and experience relationship to self, family, others, community, society, nature, and the significant or sacred. Spirituality is expressed through beliefs, values, traditions, and practices. (p. 646)*

These definitions are most helpful to this study in that they allow for individual interpretation of what is 'Ultimate' for each person. Instead of Pargament's often quoted view of spirituality as "a search for the sacred" (Paloutzian & Park, 2005) which maintains a close tie to religion, there is emphasis on being and experiencing in these less overtly religious perspectives.

With these broader conceptions, spirituality is situated both within the person (immanent), as well as in connection to a larger dimension (transcendent). A helpful illustration of these two concepts is Grof's (2008) discussion of spiritual experiences using the analogy of television. He describes immanence as a subtle, yet profound shift in daily perception where the world feels thoroughly connected, as in deep encounters with nature. He suggests this experience is like changing from black and white television into a vivid, colour picture. Alternately, the transcendent state, which may involve the experience of beings or realms

outside an everyday consciousness, can be seen as tuning into a new, just discovered, television channel (p. 49).

Debates on spirituality, religion, and transcendence are innumerable and not within the scope of this research to resolve. However, some definitions of transcendence that align to a secular perspective provide context for the primarily non-religious approach within this study.

Coleman III et al., (2016) reflect on the term 'Horizontal Transcendence', for significant experiences that people do not credit to either spirituality or religion. This concept is defined as "the experiential dimension to human life of interconnectedness that is profound, exceptional, and wondrous while requiring no religious, spiritual, or theistic framework or narrative" (Coleman III et al., 2013, p. 11).

Kurtz and White (2015) review of the secular spirituality within the Alcoholics Anonymous program, which they categorized as "beyond and between" (p.65), suggests both vertical and horizontal transcendence. The vertical transcendence sees a move beyond the self: "out from the narrow confines of the self-centred self; and up toward some reality greater than, larger than, the self-involved self"(p.65); while horizontal transcendence equates to the between-ness of connecting with others (p. 66). They posit that the spiritual part of our human nature uses both directional approaches:

> *Transcendence must be horizontal as well as vertical: to look only 'up', to reach only 'up', is to feel one's aloneness, and standing alone can be dizzying. To realize our full humanity we must also reach out, and when we do look around, between, we discover our connections - the between-nesses that link us with others. (p. 67)*

Those participants in my study who do follow a traditional religion would include a vertical transcendence connected to their theistic beliefs.

Another perspective is that of self-transcendence. Harris (2014), in his writing on spirituality as separate from religion, sees self-transcendence as a deeper principle common to all people, regardless of religious affiliation. This ability to cut through self-preoccupation to understand the world more clearly is his definition of spirituality. He contends that spirituality contributes to a fulfilling and meaningful life by creating peace of mind, even if

only momentary. He states "it is possible to be at ease in the world for no reason, if only for a few moments at a time, and that such ease is synonymous with transcending the apparent boundaries of the self" (Harris, p. 17). Self-transcendence is elaborated further in the following section on spiritual experiences.

These broad and inclusive perspectives on spirituality and its transcendent nature are the backdrop for this study. This research focused primarily on the accounts of people who do not have a formal, religious connection in order to understand how spirituality is recognized and used by a significant proportion of people who feel they are spiritual, but not religious; as well, as those who do not identify with either category, but feel some type of transcendence nonetheless. To that end, I have added the descriptor "personal" to spiritual experience to denote something more inclusive, less anchored in religion, and not necessarily connected to God or other traditional ideas/terms. For the purpose of this study, then, spirituality is broadly defined as that which participants identify in their experiences that allows them to transcend the earthquake stress, in whatever dimension and form that takes, be it horizontal, vertical, theistic or other.

2.1.3 Types of Spiritual Experiences

The history of the study of spiritual experiences includes two academics of note from both ends of the 20th century. William James' study of collected religious experiences was the content of the Gifford Lectures in 1901 and remains a valuable source of information on spiritual and mystical experiences today (James, 1902/2004). Sir Alister Hardy, a marine biologist and chair of Zoology at Oxford University, shared James' fascination with spirituality. Upon retiring from his biology career, Hardy founded the Religious Experience Research Centre at Manchester College, Oxford in 1969 which currently houses over 6000 accounts of people's personal spiritual experiences (Trust, 2016) (https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/alister-hardy-religious-experience-research-centre/). Hawker (2000) observed that Hardy was not intent on proving the existence of God with this collection, but instead wanted to amass "specimens" of spiritual experiences that could then be analysed. He wanted science to recognize the spiritual aspect of man and so set out

> *to present such a weight of **objective** evidence in the form of **written records** of these subjective spiritual feelings and of their effects on the lives of the people concerned, that the intellectual world must*

> *come to see that they are in fact as real and as influential as are the forces of love. (bold, Hardy's emphasis) (Hardy, as found in Hawker, 2000, p. 41)*

In 1985, research was conducted in Nottingham, England, based on the question Hardy used: "Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or a power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?" (Hay, 1985). Despite low membership in a religious institution, 62% of the random sample in this industrial suburb indicated that they had this kind of experience at least once, if not more often in their lives. Of interest in this research was the inclusion of voluntary interviews as follow up to the surveys, which added depth to the study findings. The researchers felt that including these one-on-one meetings in the participants' homes created a safe and comfortable environment for the participants to then speak candidly about their experiences, which many were reluctant to do in the past.

A more contemporary approach to exploring people's spiritual experiences is the Varieties Corpus at The University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Center (https://www.varietiescorpus.com/**)**. This multi-disciplinary research unit, which began in 2017, is currently collecting stories of spiritual and mystical experiences for scientific study. The existence of this unit, Hardy's archives, and the enduring relevance of James' work indicate recognition that people do have personal spiritual experiences not always located within religion. Academics in both religion (Cady, 2015; Fisher, 2011) and neuroscience (Kyriacou, 2018; Newberg & Newberg, 2005) suggest this capacity for spiritual experience is inherent within all people and can have a positive impact on their wellbeing.

In considering types of spiritual experiences in this research, it is helpful to note William James' description of the characteristics of mystical experience as possible criteria to be found in Cantabrians' experience. The four characteristics he found common to such events were that they were largely indescribable; contained a noetic quality, that is holding a deep and profound truth; were temporary; and were uncontrollable (James, 1985).

Sometimes, in extremely dire and dangerous situations, people have reported extraordinary encounters with other people. One such experience is feeling the presence of another being or entity, usually felt as positive and often, helpful and instructive. Suedfeld and Mocellin

(1987) refer to this as the “sensed presence experience”. There are many examples of these encounters, usually from the realm of mountaineering, sailing, and other extreme and unusual environments (Suedfeld & Mocellin, 1987). Geiger (2009) went on to examine this topic using the term the “Third Man” to describe this temporary, ethereal helper and continued his research into perceived angelic experiences (Geiger, 2013).

Another type of otherworldly experience is the Near-Death Experience (NDE) or Out-of-Body Experience (OBE). People in this situation often describe feeling an external sensation to the self – as in viewing their own body from a distance. This perspective is characterized by a heightened sense of consciousness, completely lacking in pain and a peaceful, all-encompassing positivity (Pearson, 2014). Tassell-Matamua (2014) indicates that this consciousness feels as though it transcends space, time, and perception during near-fatal experiences. Interestingly, in their research on NDE’s, Tassell-Matamua and Steadman (2017) found increases in spirituality after NDE experiences, while religiousness was not influenced in any significant way (p 44).

Self-transcendent moments of awe are another type of spiritual experience. An example of this is the feeling reported by astronauts as they view the planet earth from space. An early photograph of earth from space, Earthrise, still famous today, attests to the appeal and evocative power of a grander perspective (Yaden et al., 2016). Self-Transcendent experiences (STE’s) can range from these instances of awe to more profound peak or mystical experiences on a continuum of intensity (Yaden et al., 2017). Aspects of transcendence included in Csikszentmihalyi’s consideration of attention in flow (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), and Maslow’s study of peak and plateau experiences (Maslow, 1964) (Maslow, 1970), are considered in the following section.

2.2 Contemporary Psychology

Spirituality and transcendence are relevant in areas of psychology that consider the holistic person, which includes the spiritual dimension of consciousness (Grof, 2008). This postmaterialist perspective challenges the common view in psychology which purports that consciousness happens only within the physical brain (Schwartz, 2012; Walach, 2017). In the materialist tradition, non-ordinary states of consciousness are often treated as aberrations not to be taken seriously (Grof, 2008).

Another perspective that takes spirituality into account is psychology that focuses on positive factors that contribute to a flourishing life (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). With a similar outlook on the positive, researchers concluded that despite the initial shock and stress of an earthquake or other natural disaster, most people do recover after trauma – less than 25% show significant mental health issues after one year and this total decreases over time (Bonanno, 2009; Green, 1995). Suedfeld (2012) takes this to mean that people are generally indomitable – possessing inherent strength that is a core precept of positive psychology and its precursor, humanistic psychology.

2.2.1 From Peaks to Plateaus and Flow

Beginning in the 1960's, humanistic psychologists started to concentrate on people's capacity for growth and achieving their highest human potential (Grof, 2008). Abraham Maslow typified this movement with his research on peak experiences which he characterized as a "private, personal, transcendent, core-religious experience" that is accepted and used by the peak-experiencer (Maslow, 1964). In this phrasing, he interprets core-religious not as formal religion, but, rather, the common content present in all peak or transcendent experiences. Maslow concluded from his research findings that all people had or could have peak experiences, but some chose to suppress or deny this experience.

Building on this research, and American society's growing interest in meditation and different states of consciousness, Maslow spearheaded the formation of transpersonal psychology in 1967. He joined psychologists Anthony Sutich, Stanislav Grof, James Fadiman, Miles Vich, and Sonya Margulies, to launch the Association of Transpersonal Psychology which honoured "the entire spectrum of human experience, including various non-ordinary states of consciousness" (Grof, 2008, p. 47).

In 1970, Maslow expanded his concept of peak experience to include an everyday version – the plateau experience (Maslow, 1970a). This type of spiritual experience was less dramatic than a peak one, resulting in a quiet serenity characterised by an enduring calmness. He described the plateau experience as a type of casual blissfulness that a person could summon at will, less dramatic than the surprising and un-controlled aspect of the peak experience or William James' mystical experiences.

The plateau experience aligns with the concept of flow researched by Csikszentmihalyi (2008), which is itself often referenced in Positive Psychology (see Section 2.2.2). The focus

of the concept of flow is on the application of attention as "psychic energy" to a task that challenges and uses all of a person's abilities (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Flow draws on characteristics present in creativity and play, and is defined by intense concentration that involves complete engagement in a task or experience (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). This flow state, along with peak and plateau experiences, suggests a way of accessing a broader consciousness that transcends a mundane life perspective. This state of transcendence is considered one of six universal virtues in positive psychology, with spirituality as a strength that could be harnessed to facilitate coping.

2.2.2 Positive Psychology and Character Strengths

Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi and Martin Seligman are acknowledged as the founders of Positive Psychology. Defined originally as the study of strength and virtue, and based on happiness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), it has since become known as the science of flourishing (Seligman, 2012). In the inaugural introduction to this new area in psychology, Csikzenmihalyi credits Maslow and other humanist psychologists with laying the foundation for this new paradigm (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000); while Seligman concedes that Maslow was the first to use the phrase "positive psychology" (Seligman, 2018).

One of the first significant projects in Positive Psychology was the collaboration of the late Christopher Peterson and Seligman, to create the Values in Action, Signature Strengths Inventory as a positive alternative to the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder that is used to classify conditions in clinical patients). Instead of a codification of mental illnesses, the VIA Signature Strengths Inventory was a manual denoting "sanity" by focusing on good character and values (Seligman, 2018, p. 246).

Transcendence, with spirituality as a character strength, is one of six overall virtues in this wellbeing manual. It is comprised of a group of strengths that "connect to something larger and more permanent: to other people, to the future, to evolution, to the divine, or to the universe" (Seligman, 2012, p. 259). This virtue category of transcendence contains the following seven character strengths:

- Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence
- Gratitude
- Hope/Optimism/Future-Mindedness
- Spirituality/Sense of Purpose/Faith/Religiousness
- Forgiveness and Mercy

- Playfulness and Humor
- Zest/Passion/Enthusiasm (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2012, p. 265)

In this categorization, transcendence is the overarching virtue with spirituality being one aspect, comprised of beliefs around the universe, God, and one's place in the larger picture of life (Seligman, 2012). Spirituality and transcendence are terms often used interchangeably; however, since some choose to attach spirituality to a theistic perspective, transcendence is the more general term. All of the character strengths in this category would fit into the inclusive definition of spirituality in this study, which recognizes whatever the participants identify as that which allows them to transcend stress.

The Character Strengths Inventory is meant to be a practical tool to assist people to both use the strengths that come naturally to them when confronting difficulty, as well as be aware of areas that need developing. Transcendence, conceptualized as a strength category, is likely to be associated with the role that spirituality may have played in coping after the earthquakes.

While some argue that positive psychology is too naïve with its emphasis on positive psychological qualities (Wong, 2010), this is leavened by a second wave in positive psychology discussed in the section below, that recognizes the important interplay between positive and negative facets of human experience (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016).

2.2.3 Other Relevant Theories

Other theories within positive psychology suggest ways in which spirituality is operationalized to assist recovery after trauma. Theoretical concepts discussed below include using positive emotions experienced within spirituality to expand a person's ability to cope, which then contributes to a sense of empowerment and enhanced self-determination. The strength of spirituality or transcendence creates a hardiness to withstand stress, seeing it as a surmountable challenge. Finally, optimism within a long-standing difficult situation is also one of the character strengths within transcendence, and is a key concept within existential positive psychology.

Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions

Positive emotions are now regarded as an important part of people's ability to live, cope and thrive. Similar to the concept of flow, positive emotions propel a person to more fully engage with their situation and environment. Fredrickson (2001) contends that when people

experience positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment and love, to name a few, this broadens their attention and behaviours, which then leads to building more social, intellectual and physical resources and capacities. For example, if people feel love for their family, friends and community, this helps them focus on these others, noticing their feelings, ways of acting, and so on, which expands the ability to relate well to others, including anticipating how to deal with any difficulties that may arise in the relationships. Or in the case of play, interacting with others and trying out new behaviours in a fun way can increase social and other skills, which can then be applied in other settings. Instead of constricting attention and action in the face of fear or stress, which might be the appropriate response in an immediately dangerous situation, this "broaden-and-build" theory suggests that a person opens up their range of positive reactions as part of the positive feeling.

Van Cappellen et al. (2013) apply this theory in their study of the self-transcendent positive emotions of awe, gratitude, love, and peace within spirituality. It found the expanded effect of these emotions to be "a belief in life as meaningful and a belief in the benevolence of others and the world" (Van Cappellen et al., 2013, p. 1390). This positive view of the world would support Cantabrians' coping ability during their prolonged recovery after the earthquakes as also suggested by Shing et al. (2016).

A precursor to the recognition of positive emotions during stress was the work of Antonovsky, who coined the term salutogenesis to reflect a focus on health rather than dis-ease (Antonovsky, 1990)**.** At the core of this perspective was the concept of sense of coherence, which was defined as:

> *A global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that 1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable and explicable; 2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and 3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement. (p. 78)*

While the people in Canterbury certainly had their view of the earth as stable and predictable severely challenged during the earthquakes, spirituality may have been a resource to meet this new difficult reality. In this way, Antonovsky 's (1990) sense of

coherence is similar to the theories of self-determination and hardiness that are reviewed below.

Self-Determination Theory

An overarching theory of human motivation is that of self-determination theory. It suggests that the three basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are necessary for optimal wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In relation to spirituality, competence could be experienced as similar to the quiet confidence or casual blissfulness mentioned by Maslow in his description of plateau experiences, which contributes to a person's ability to successfully confront stress. Autonomy relates to the act of self-responsibility inherent in clarifying personal values and then acting in alignment with them, thus living according to personal meaning. Finally, relatedness may pertain to the connectedness to family, community, nature, and/or a God/Higher Power, which fulfils the sense of belongingness Deci and Ryan (2002) identified as a paramount need. These intrinsic needs are similar to the international consensus definition Puchalski (2014) described in section 2.1.2, of spirituality as an intrinsic force focused on meaning, relationship, and expressing values.

Hardiness and Stress-Mindset

Self-determination theory's emphasis on using basic needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness is similar to the concept of hardiness originally developed by Kobasa (1979), which involves "attitudes of commitment (vs. alienation), control (vs. powerlessness), and challenge (vs. security)" (Maddi, 2004, pp. 279-280). These attitudes enable a person to withstand stress by engaging with the process of coping, seeing themselves as capable of overcoming the presenting challenges.

Related to the attitude of challenge, is the research on stress-mindset which suggests that an empowered mindset is more important to effectively deal with stress than the exact content and size of the stressor (Crum, et al., 2013). These researchers' series of studies explored the hypothesis that a significant marker for successfully navigating stress was a mindset that viewed stress as a challenge, rather than a debilitating threat. Their findings suggested this empowered mindset was more significant in coping with stress than the nature and severity of the stressor itself (Crum et al., 2013, p. 728).

Maddi contends that hardiness is a function of "existential courage" in that it is a choice to move forward into an unknown future, rather than shrinking into or holding onto the past

(Maddi, 2006). In order to overcome the stress of the earthquakes, it could be argued that people needed to have faith in their ability to deal with the challenging new reality. That is, they may have needed hardiness and an empowered stress-mindset.

Tragic Optimism and Existential Positive Psychology

The forward looking perspective of hardiness, and the self-responsibility within self-determination, are inherent in the theory of tragic optimism, which was developed by Frankl (1946/1985) based on his concentration camp experiences during World War II. He defined it as a person's ability to rise above tragedy by focusing on the human potential to overcome suffering, change for the better, and take responsible action knowing that difficulties in life are transitory (Frankl, 1985). In short, it is the ability to find meaning in any circumstance, which then provides the impetus to carry on.

This focus on finding meaning within negative experiences is central to Existential Positive Psychology that has developed primarily within British and Canadian psychology. In response to positive psychology's concentration on maximizing positive experiences, Existential Positive Psychology or "Second Wave Positive Psychology" emphasizes the importance of negative events alongside positivity (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016). It recognizes that positive aspects in life co-exist with life difficulties, and synthesizing both of these contributes to a flourishing life (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016). That is, people often only discover and use their strengths when tested by adverse circumstances. Accordingly, a fulfilled life is not about being stress-free, but rather, it involves embracing the striving and struggle involved in pursuing meaningful goals that emerge under difficult circumstances (Frankl, p. 127). Ryff (2014) sees this as an eudaimonic approach to adversity, which means it involves understanding and using, the highest, best part of our self. She contends that adverse circumstances "require finding inner strengths and resources of renewal. While personal capacities may be deepened, self-knowledge may also be expanded, including paradoxically, awareness of one's limitations and vulnerabilities" (p. 3).

Similarly, Wong (2017) suggests that a sign of mature spirituality is acknowledging that life will produce challenges, and that having faith, be that religious, trust in others or self-confidence, gives a person a sense of peace to persevere.

2.3 Stress and Coping

From the broad perspective of spirituality and transcendence, and its presence within contemporary psychology, I now consider stress and coping theory to understand how spirituality might be situated within stressful situations that require some degree of coping. Aligning with the broaden-and-build theory discussed above, the efficacy of positive emotions have also been noted within stress and coping research. Over the last thirty years there has been a move away from the primary focus on negative impacts of stress and the alleviation of this discomfort, to recognizing the concurrence of positive emotions and states within the coping process (Folkman, 2010). As will be discussed, the Park and Folkman (1997) revised theory of stress and coping provides a framework for considering spirituality within coping.

2.3.1 The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

Original theorizing in the stress and coping literature suggested a model involving a cognitive appraisal of stressful situations and a person's ability to manage them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The theory noted two appraisal activities. A primary appraisal consisted of assessing the level of stress from an event in terms of threat, challenge or harm. If threat or harm was present, a secondary appraisal involved deciding how best to manage the stressor to alleviate this distress. A challenge assessment meant an ability to overcome the difficulty and therefore, stress did not ensue.

The ways of coping with stress were initially viewed as falling into two areas - problem-focused or emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping involves addressing the source of the stress in a practical way, such as in the earthquake situation, making sure family are safe, checking the house for damage, liaising with the insurance company if needed, and so on. Emotion-focused coping would be managing the feelings associated with the stress, such as calming the fear in the wake of ongoing aftershocks or dealing with the anger and sadness of having to leave the family home due to it being deemed unsafe to repair. These appraisal coping styles can occur simultaneously, in a dynamic response to the needs of the situation. The original theory posited that if the stress was not resolved, the process kept repeating, thus creating chronic stress.

Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions caused researchers to consider the role of positive emotions within stress and coping. In their research with AIDS patients and their families, Folkman and Moskowitz (2007) discovered a pattern of frequent positive affect alongside the negative aspects of coping with a largely terminal condition of a family member (Folkman, 1997; Folkman and Moskowitz, 2007). This consideration of positive emotions within ongoing, unresolvable stress led to the theory that these positive emotions might ensue from finding meaning.

The transactional model of coping was revised to include a third form of coping: meaning-focused (Folkman, 2008). When emotion-focused and problem-focused coping are not completely effective or appropriate in a continuously stressful situation, the revised theory suggests that people often then engage in meaning-focused coping to bring relief. This involves reappraising the continuing situation to find positive connections to a person's own values, beliefs and goals, which helps a person carry on and even thrive. Part of a meaning-focused process could involve using spiritual beliefs and experiences to create existential meaning (Folkman, 1997, p. 1216).

2.3.2 Spiritual Framework of Coping

Building on the work of Park and Folkman (1997), Gall et al. (2005) developed the Spiritual Framework of Coping, which used the transactional model as a "scaffold" to understand the place and function of spirituality within coping. In the spiritual framework, a major stressor is appraised through a spiritual lens whereby a person's religious orientation and problem-solving style combines with their spiritual coping behaviours to create meaning. Up to this point, the framework is oriented towards a more traditional religious perspective such as appraising the stressor in relation to God and using religious practices as coping behaviours. However, Gall does include non-traditional spiritual coping practises such as connecting with nature, others, and meditation (Gall et al., p. 93).

One study has used this spiritual framework within a transpersonal psychology perspective, which is about connecting with an expanded consciousness outside the ego self. Lancaster and Palframan (2009) explored the nature of transformation and spirituality after major life events, identifying openness as the core category in their results. This meant that the participants only reaped the benefits of spirituality by first letting go of the "strain and

stress" they encountered in their difficult circumstance (Lancaster & Palframan, 2009, p. 264). This openness was seen as spirituality that extended to the transcendent such as God, a higher power, or energy; others, which included family, friends, and pets; and, involved a transformation process that manifested gradually over time.

Most of the research that considers spirituality within the transactional model happens in the health sector, with few studies differentiating spirituality from religion. In their work with patients managing HIV, Ironson et al., (2011), using the broad definition of spirituality as a personal search for a sacred connection, outlined some of the ways participants said spirituality/religiousness assisted with their coping as "meaning-making; appraisal of the stressor to be less toxic, appraisal of the self to be stronger, the feeling that one has support and guidance and is not alone, and elicitation of a calming response with a sense of peace and well-being" (Ironson et al., 2011, p. 312).

In a follow-up longitudinal study with HIV patients, Ironson et al., (2016) observed that spiritual coping predicted greater survivability seventeen years on. The research described the components of spiritual coping as spiritual practises such as yoga, meditation, and prayer; positive spiritual reframing such as seeing meaning in getting HIV; spiritual empowerment seen as strengthened overall coping ability; gratitude; and overcoming spiritual guilt - often an issue facing people who struggle to reconcile their homosexuality or drug use with religious perspectives of condemnation (Ironson et al., 2016, pp. 1072-1074).

In other research considering spirituality and meaning making, Mattis (2002) combined the constructs of spirituality and religion in her work with African American women's coping experiences. Her findings framed the results of her narrative research in broad spiritual terms by concluding that religion/spirituality helped the women to

> Interrogate and accept the reality of their circumstances; identify, confront, and transcend limitations; engage in spiritual surrender; identify and grapple with existential questions and life lessons; recognize their own purpose and destiny and the purpose of others' lives; act in principled ways; achieve growth; and accept transcendent sources of knowledge. (p. 317)

This study is one of few that concentrates on the explicit spiritual content in the research findings, understanding spirituality as a separate concept from religion. At the same time, by virtue of the largely Christian sample, it demonstrates that spirituality as a different, more personal construct, often does coexist within a formal religious perspective.

2.3.3 Meaning-Focused Coping and Spirituality After Disasters

In the definitions of spirituality cited earlier in the literature, and in the above studies of spirituality within coping, meaning is a central concept. From her work on global and situational meaning, Park (2016) suggests that meaning making is a key process within recovery and resilience after disaster. She posits that a person's global meaning, which incorporates their beliefs about themselves and the world, as well as their goals and values, must be reassessed when confronted with the new, situational meaning created by a disaster. Park states that "disaster's devastating effects on myriad aspects of survivors' lives, livelihood, family, home, and community will almost certainly violate their ordinary way of understanding the world and the goals and ways of life that they were pursuing prior to the disaster" (Park, 2016, p. 3).

Spirituality could assist in this new meaning construction process, or for some, represent a spiritual process within the meaning-making/finding. There is some research that looks at meaning-focused coping after natural disasters, but very little that considers spirituality separate from religion. A search using spirituality and earthquakes in SCOPUS produced 67 journal articles, with only seven appearing to differentiate spirituality from religion.

Ekanayake et al., (2013) found that residents in Sri Lanka did use religious or spiritual beliefs as well as social connections to cope and find meaning after the 2004 Asian Tsunami. Similarly, a study conducted in Tamil Nadu, India identified religion as one of the most important coping mechanisms after the tsunami disaster for 67% of the respondents (Rajkumar et al., 2008), but indicated that religion was seen as one part of an overall spirituality. In contrast, Stratta et al. (2013) reported levels of spiritual struggle versus religiosity after the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake in Italy and noted data indicating only the religious dimension, not spirituality, helped people to cope. Yet Subandi et al. (2014) found that of their hypotheses that spirituality, gratitude, and hope were linked to post-traumatic growth in survivors of the 2010 Mount Merapi eruption in Indonesia, only spirituality was shown to have a positive role.

In China, Guo et al. (2013) recognized the role of meaning-focused coping at different points in disaster recovery and suggested it was the most beneficial approach for adolescent survivors of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Ren (2012) focused on spirituality in recovery after the Sichuan disaster and found that some Chinese residents struggled with their spiritual/religious beliefs, while others adhered to a spirituality defined as responsibility to family, culture and ancestors which served to enrich a sense community.

Finally, Payton (2013) explored how Haitians used Vodou and several other religions simultaneously to make sense of the 2010 Haiti earthquake in an oral history project. The blending of several voices highlighted the complexity of personal spirituality and the need to respect all the ways it is experienced by people.

2.4 Summary

In order to understand the nature of spirituality in coping, literature in three areas was discussed: spirituality; contemporary psychology; and, stress and coping theory. Spirituality is understood as an increasingly relevant phenomenon in society, despite the difficulty in defining the concept. Criteria for mystical experiences, as well as other types of spiritual experiences, provided a context for exploring the personal spiritual or meaningful experiences of the participants in my study.

Theories within contemporary psychology considered spirituality within a comprehensive context of human nature. Concepts such as peak, plateau, and flow experiences suggested that spirituality could involve deep engagement that offered a way to transcend an everyday perspective proving helpful during stressful conditions. The Signature Strengths Inventory in positive psychology claims transcendence as one of twenty-four strengths that people could utilize for wellbeing in their life, and other theories focusing on positive emotions, hardiness and optimism also suggest a practical value of spirituality.

The transactional model of stress and coping (Folkman, 1997) which incorporates problem-, emotion- and meaning-focused coping provided an initial theory of stress and coping, while Gall et al. (2005) suggested a spiritual framework of coping, with an emphasis on a religious perspective. Studies reviewed explored the benefits of spirituality in coping with HIV, coping with stress by African Americans, and coping from a transpersonal psychology perspective. The few studies that considered spirituality separate from religion post-earthquake were

reviewed, with the majority of them indicating spirituality contributed to post-disaster recovery.

To explore the nature of spirituality and how it may be associated with post-earthquake coping and recovery, I have chosen a qualitative approach, which is outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology

"Maybe stories are just data with a soul."

Brene Brown

The purpose of this research was to explore the role that spirituality may play in coping and recovery after trauma, such as that experienced during and after the 2010/11 earthquakes in Canterbury, New Zealand. This study explored this phenomenon by considering the following questions:

1) What is the nature of any personal spiritual or meaningful experiences people may have had during or since the earthquakes beginning on September 4, 2010?
2) How were these experiences associated with people's coping and recovery?

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was chosen for the research. Methodology and methods are discussed below, followed by issues of quality criteria, researcher positioning, and ethical considerations. The next section in the chapter details the methods used, including recruitment and data-collection, interviews, and thematic analysis.

3.1 Qualitative Research

Spirituality is a complicated subject for academic research. As the definitions in the preceding chapters attest, it is a highly personal and complex topic that requires an openness to interpretation, and respect for each person's individual understanding. Ritchie (2003b) states that research that focuses on understanding context and process, as well as complicated, intangible and internalized phenomena such as the nature of spirituality, may be best studied qualitatively (Ritchie, pp. 32, 33).

A qualitative approach explores the ways in which people construct and use meaning in their life, which aligns with the Interpretivist way of knowing that was first systematically defined by Immanuel Kant in 1781 in his "Critique of Pure Reason". He suggested:

- *Perception relates not only to the senses but to human interpretations of what our senses tell us;*
- *Our knowledge of the world is based on 'understanding' which arises from thinking about what happens to us, not just simply from having had particular experiences;*
- *Knowing and knowledge transcend basic empirical enquiry;*
- *Distinctions exist between 'scientific reason' (based strictly on causal determinism) and 'practical reason' (based on moral freedom and decision-making, which involve less certainty). (as cited in Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 24)*

In other words, interpretation based on personal experience that is not easily measured or quantified, is a valuable form of knowledge.

This interpretivist way of knowing resides within the Interpretivism/Social Constructivism paradigm, which Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) distinguish from the three other research paradigms of Post Positivism, Critical Theory, and, Pragmatism. Social Constructivism/Interpretivism is an interactive approach relying on engagement between the researcher and participants in an ongoing inductive process of understanding meaning. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state, "the constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the world) set of methodological procedures" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13).

Post Positivism involves similar assumptions to those that underpin quantitative research, which uses hypotheses and theory to test reality. Critical Theory has a political focus of involving research participants as co-creators within the research to address social imbalances and provide advocacy. Pragmatism supports a practical stance recognizing that both quantitative and qualitative methods may be used to most appropriately address a research problem.

Posing the question of people's personal spiritual or meaningful experiences and their impact upon coping and recovery aligns with Constructivism by exploring people's subjective experiences and the meanings they hold for them. Instead of developing *a priori* themes and relating the research to a hypothesis, I chose to inductively explore the largely unknown territory of meaning and spirituality in post-earthquake recovery. I did not see this as a particularly political problem requiring advocacy as in Critical Theory. I also saw the

phenomenological nature of the research not requiring mixed methods since this study was not as focused on solving a research problem, as exploring the content of the self-reported experiences. Some argue that a finer point should be made regarding a constructivist versus constructionist epistemology (Young & Collin, 2004). This recognizes the tension of emphasizing knowledge as constructed within an individual versus knowledge created through interaction with others. I would suggest that both perspectives are relevant to this research. The knowledge resides within each individual participant, but even asking them to tell their stories begins a social interaction and broader understanding, which is then constructed by me as the researcher in the analysis. Therefore, I agree with Geelan (1997) that knowledge occurs amidst an overall constructivist continuum that weaves in both the personal and the social.

Following on from this constructivist view, I review five common traditions in qualitative research methods which could be employed: case study, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Case study and ethnography both focus on the everyday circumstance of a subject and usually involve considerable observation and engagement in the field. Since the phenomenon under study is largely personal (being a spiritual or meaningful experience of the participant) and not physically observable, and there was limited budget for prolonged field involvement, I did not select these methods. Grounded theory is most appropriate when studying new, repeating phenomenon and seeking to develop original theory as explanation, unlike this research that was guided by existing theories in stress and coping, and positive psychology.

This research does have aspects of phenomenology and narrative inquiry. Since the research question considered a process of recovery over time and required participants to explore meaning within coping, the natural way to communicate this involved narrative. However, I did not solicit a formal, structured story from each participant at the outset of the research. Instead, I invited participants to share their experiences in response to the research question during minimally directed, in-depth interviews. The narrative-like accounts that ensued were a way for the participants to reflect back on their coping experiences while also constructing their "story" with me as an engaged listener. Kim's (2015) reflections on the word narrative in its Latin form are relevant here when she says "the word narrative is from Latin narrat- ("related,""told"), narrare ("to tell"), or late Latin narrativus ("telling a story"), all of which are akin to Latin gnarus ("knowing"), derived from the ancient Sanskrit gna ("to

know")"(Kim, p. 6). Both the participants and I as the researcher came to know by the telling of their experiences.

3.1.1 Quality Criteria

Quality in traditional quantitative research rests with ideas of validity, reliability and generalisability (Loh, 2013). Qualitative research addresses these same concerns but is assessed in ways appropriate for its different ontological and epistemological view. Lincoln and Guba (1985) attended to this critical issue in their seminal piece on Narrative Inquiry, which outlined the key value factor to be *trustworthiness*. The criteria they set out for creating trustworthiness were credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity). Tracy (2010) sought to further define these quality measures by suggesting qualitative research involve 1) a worthy topic, 2) rich rigour, 3) sincerity, 4) credibility, 5) resonance, 6) significant contribution, 7) ethics, and 8) meaningful coherence. Altheide and Johnson (2011) consolidate these further by summarizing validity criteria as that which entails "*considering the place of evidence in an interaction process between the researcher, the subject matter (phenomenon to be investigated), the intended effect or utility, and the audience for which the project will be evaluated and assessed" (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, p. 593).*

This research project adheres to the concept of trustworthiness as validity in the following ways. I identified that the topic of spirituality (as distinct from religion) in post-disaster recovery was an area needing further investigation. When combined with the extreme and unusual environment of the Canterbury Earthquake Sequence and prolonged existing recovery of Christchurch, this research was timely and valuable for contributing information on how spirituality may be a coping tool in disaster recovery.

Rich rigour and dependability involves thoroughness in conceptualizing and completing the research and clearly presenting the steps in this process. I attended to this by carefully reflecting on the methods used in the study; adapting the recruitment process as needed to include different locations and sources for participants; theoretically sensitizing the study; and, clearly describing the analysis process.

Credibility and sincerity in the research consider issues of authenticity in the data. I achieved this through my own self-reflexivity woven into the project; using an appropriate number of participants in the study; undertaking detailed and prompt transcriptions of the interviews;

engaging repeatedly with the participants' interviews; and, seeking feedback from the participants to clarify their information as needed.

A note on credibility from narrative researchers also applies here due to the narrative-like interviews used as data. Polkinghorne (2007) states it is not whether the narratives are true but whether they fully represent the meaning intended by the participant:

> *Storied evidence is gathered not to determine if events actually happened but about the meaning experienced by people whether or not the events are accurately described…Storied texts serve as evidence for personal meaning, not for the factual occurrence of the events reported in the stories.* (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 479).

Finally, the external criteria of resonance and utility of the research are considered. Thick description and appropriate delivery of the material are key in good qualitative research. I endeavoured to communicate the essence of the participants' experiences in vignettes while also highlighting the common themes amongst all of the participants' story-like interview data. The effectiveness of both the creative presentation of the data, and the thematic analysis is the phenomenological nod of recognition that occurs as people read it and transfer it to relevant parts of their own life or other similar situations.

The significance of this project lies in the 'gap' it fills of qualitative exploration of broadly conceptualized spirituality as part of post-disaster coping. It contributes to the body of work in positive psychology outlined in the literature, which recognizes meaning and spirituality as a valuable facet of human flourishing. On a practical note, this research aligns with public health programming such as the *All Right?* Campaign created in Christchurch to assist people in coping after the earthquakes (D'Aeth, 2014). The content of the programme considers well-being in a holistic way, encouraging people to connect with others as well as embracing their own innate resiliency, both actions a form of implied spirituality helping to transcend the stress. It is this focus on explicit or implied spirituality that this research highlights, encouraging a view of spirituality as a practical tool in coping after trauma.

3.1.2 Researcher Position

The constructivist nature of this research recognizes that the data are not collected completely objectively but rather are affected by the interaction between the participant

and the researcher. To mitigate subjective bias as much as possible, the researcher must acknowledge their own position throughout the study. This reflexivity begins with a consideration of my background with both Canterbury in New Zealand, and spirituality.

My first trip from my home in Canada to New Zealand occurred thirty years prior to the start of the field work of this study. More recent trips to Christchurch and the Canterbury area happened annually during 2006 to 2015 as I assisted with other PhD research and visited friends. While I was not in Christchurch at the time of the earthquakes I did see the devastating after-effects and mourned the damage to the "Garden City", one of my personal touchstone places in the country. This familiarity with Christchurch as it was and the pain of seeing it afterward provided a small insider perspective that helped to create common ground with my participants. At the same time, knowing I could escape back to my seismically stable home in Canada, and not having first hand experience of the earthquakes reminded me of my outsider status. However, this distinction ultimately assisted my ability to be open and curious with the data, acknowledging the participants as the experts on this topic.

Spirituality in all its forms, from within religion, to non-structured everyday aspects of connecting to something "other than", to more esoteric spiritualist perspectives, is an area of long-held interest and personal priority. To me, spirituality is the force within each of us calling us to live our best life and guiding us in this process. It is an energy that permeates everyone and everything, is not necessarily tied to a God, and is centered in love. My personal experience of spirituality as an integral part of wellness in my own life led me to wonder about its existence in the lives of people in Canterbury as they coped with the earthquakes. Since my own definition of spirituality is quite broad it allows me to be open to the diverse ways participants may speak about it, and will encourage a liberal interpretation of how this concept is experienced by them.

Since spirituality is not usually an everyday topic and can be difficult to broach at any time, let alone within a research framework, it required a thoughtful approach to recruitment. Despite trying to be impartial and objective by using relatively neutral terms to describe the topic (e.g., meaningful experiences), and in order to improve recruitment and identify willing participants, I had to speak the "S" word – spirituality - when talking to people about this

research. By attending events in Christchurch such as an art show, an environmental expo and spirituality/wellness expos, and gauging reactions when speaking generally about the topic of my research, I was able to use my "insider" background in religion and spirituality to connect with people. When they showed interest in the project and comfort with the topic, I invited them to participate in the research.

The challenge in this project lay with bridging my outsider status of lack of direct earthquake experience, and tempering my insider status of common recognition of a spiritual realm, to provide a robust interpretation of the participants' points of view. I carried awareness of both of these perspectives into all aspects of this research.

3.1.3 Ethical Considerations

Two specific areas I considered when designing this research project were emotional distress when re-visiting the earthquake experience and the possibility of triggering past negative spiritual or religious experiences. The six-year-plus time lapse since the September 2010 and 2011 earthquakes helped lessen the probability of a stressful response. However, I drew on my background in social work and handling discussions that might be emotionally distressing, to be vigilant to signs of discomfort in the participants during the interviews. Should such signs have been exhibited, I was prepared to halt the interview and offer information on support services available. This was not necessary in any of the interviews. One participant, however, did wish to access some resource books I mentioned, and I provided these to her.

The Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee granted ethical approval prior to the beginning of this study.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Recruitment

Since spirituality can be an uncomfortable topic, especially in a country known to be highly secular, recruitment was challenging. The added complication of focusing on spirituality more than religion, which required avoiding overtly religious channels, contributed to that

difficulty. I used the phrase “personal spiritual experience” in my research question and then expanded that to include “meaningful experience” to encourage more people to participate in the research. The focus was on participants’ experiences of spirituality in the broadest sense and meant to include whatever they perceived this to be. I purposely avoided defining spirituality in order to uphold this open approach and learn of participants’ own views.

In addition to being over the age of 18 years, participants chosen for this study needed to meet two criteria. They had to have experienced some or all of the Canterbury Earthquake Sequence which began on 4 September 2010; and, be willing to discuss personally meaningful or spiritual experiences they may have had during or since that time. Sixteen people agreed to participate in this research as listed in Table 1 below (religious affiliation categories are as described by each participant).

Table 1: Research Participants

Interview #	Age	Gender	Religious Affiliation
1	46	Female	Catholic
2	57	Female	None
3	70	Female	None
4	72	Female	None
5	50	Female	None
6	54	Female	None
7	74	Female	Catholic
8	60	Female	Catholic
9	60	Male	Pentecostal Christian
10	48	Male	Purely Spiritual
11	63	Male	Methodist
12	56	Female	None
13	32	Female	None
14	67	Female	None - Alternative Spirituality
15	38	Female	More spiritual than religious
16	68	Male	None

Recruitment focused on two areas: Christchurch and Kaiapoi, a small commuter community approximately fifty kilometres north of Christchurch, which sustained significant damage during the first earthquake on 4 September 2010. Twenty-five percent of local businesses were affected and a third of the local housing stock was damaged with over 1000 homes eventually being “red-zoned”, which meant repair or rebuilding was not possible (Vallance,

2013). Vallance (2013) suggested that while the overall damage was less than that sustained in Christchurch in subsequent earthquakes, the proportional damage rendered Kaiapoi just as hard hit.

Initially, I did a mail drop invitation to participate in the research to fifty randomly chosen addresses from the 2016 Waimakariri electoral roll, which includes the town of Kaiapoi (See Appendix A). When this garnered no responses, I pursued a different approach. I put up posters in the community, placed advertisements in two local newspapers–*North Canterbury News* and the *Kaiapoi Advocate*–and was interviewed for articles about the research, which appeared in both papers. This process, combined with snowball referrals, yielded five participants from this area.

Obtaining participants within Christchurch involved a purposive process of using personal contacts and referrals. I used events like the Christchurch Green Expo, the Christchurch Art Show, monthly Spirituality and Wellness Expos, an open day at a meditation centre, as well as just living and being in the community as opportunities to speak informally to people about the research. Casual conversations with some of the participants allowed them to get to know me informally, thus creating enough of a relationship and sense of trust for them to then agree to be interviewed about their experiences.

Rather than focusing on large numbers of participants, I chose to analyse the interviews from sixteen participants individually and then collectively to present sufficient depth to cover the topic. In considering the issue of saturation, Guest et al. (2006) and Ando et al. (2014) demonstrated that twelve interviews were sufficient in demonstrating overall key themes in thematic analysis. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) also suggest that it is preferable when doing qualitative research with interviews to use a small number of cases. They contend that the constructivist act of communing with, understanding, and interpreting the unique perspectives of each participant requires the researcher to hold all of the cases in mind to complete the analysis.

3.2.2 Interviews

I carried out minimally directed interviews, ranging from thirty to ninety minutes in length, at locations convenient to and chosen by each participant. I provided a copy of the Research Information Sheet (Appendix B) to each person who expressed interest in participating in the study before I conducted his or her interview. Participants also completed a consent form at

the beginning of the interview, which indicated agreement to publication of the research results and willingness to be recorded during the interview.

The interviews were relaxed, conversational and open to how each participant directed it. I created a Participant Interview Guide (Appendix C) for the interviews but advised each person to begin their story wherever or however they felt was appropriate for them. Most interviews required little prompting after the initial opening and naturally ended within thirty to ninety minutes. I used a digital recorder to capture the interviews and transcribed them as soon as possible afterwards. One participant was interviewed a second time due to the unintelligible recording of the initial interview which took place in a loud café of their choice.

I contacted participants after their interview to thank them again for their participation and to ensure that the material they had discussed had not affected them negatively. All of those recruited agreed to be contacted in the future for clarification if needed and to be updated on the progress of the research. I sent an update on the research near the end of the project and also encouraged them to contact me if they wished to discuss anything further or wanted to view the completed thesis.

3.2.3 Thematic Analysis

In this research, I draw primarily on thematic analysis while also using aspects of narrative to enrich the methodological process. By using both approaches, I sought to uncover the content of each individual's interview while also illuminating the connecting themes and patterns amongst all of them. Thematic Analysis is utilized in many of the traditions described earlier and considered by Braun and Clarke (2006) to be a method in and of itself. Its strength lies in its adaptability to many research approaches while not adhering to a particular theoretical framework. As in many interpretive data analysis techniques, Thematic Analysis involves repeated and systematic engagement with the data by using a six-phase approach described by Braun et al. (2012), which includes familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, considering potential themes, recursively reviewing these themes, naming the themes and, then, writing the final story or thesis.

Creating vignettes offered a narrative approach to interpreting the data in the participant interviews by first focusing on each individual rather than the entire data set. Instead of searching for and codifying themes, this was a more fluid, intuitive process. Ellingson (2017)

talks about this engagement with the data as an embodying activity - a "head, heart and gut" analysis. It is similar to MacLure's approach, which involves the concept of wonder: sitting with the data, noting the parts that grab our attention and may not fit neatly into identified themes or categories. She says:

> *It is imperative to slow down the facile machinery of interpretation so that it catches on the snags, the lucky finds, the marginalia and the odd details that fascinate the researcher and draw her into the weave of discourse, instead of allowing her to rise above it. (MacLure, 2013, p. 174)*

Writing narrative vignettes allowed me to "slow down" the analysis (as suggested by Maclure above) to more thoroughly explore the nature of each person's experience before moving into a collective comparison. This beginning analysis started with the creation of a visual poster (see Figure 7) representing the "heart" of each participant's story-like interview, and flowed into the construction of each of the vignettes. Both of these creative steps offered an inductive way of understanding the features within the participants' spiritual and meaningful experiences before continuing to deducing themes.

Since spirituality can be uncomfortable to talk about, I did not engage further with the participants on the stories in their interviews so that they would not be tempted to "clean up" or alter their accounts. I also did not want to have the participants repeatedly re-engaging with the overall earthquake story. Reissman (2005) suggests that narrative within thematic analysis focuses on "what" the data tells us rather than the "how", and sees language as a "direct and unambiguous route to meaning" (p. 2). From this perspective, I wrote the vignettes to both deepen my analysis of the participants' interviews and use narrative as a form of creative presentation to provide thick description of the data.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

My familiarization with the data began by personally transcribing the interviews thoroughly and expediently, no later than two days after the meetings occurred. I also recorded initial notations at the end of each interview onto the Participant Interview Guide, which I later attached to the hard-copy interview transcription. I hand wrote further insights and notes onto these written transcripts as I repeatedly reviewed them.

After the first few readings of the transcripts, I created a visual poster of all of the interviews that captured my initial impressions of the data (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Participant Poster

Each of the sixteen interviews were drawn in a representative image and colour on a large newsprint page. I listed a word or phrase that captured the essence of that piece, including titles of any fully formed metaphors or vignettes that were immediately prominent, and created a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. This served to anchor the story of each participant's interview, which I later expanded into individual vignettes. I found myself

referring to this poster repeatedly throughout the analysis process especially when considering the sixteen narratives as an entire group.

3.3 Summary

This chapter set out the qualitative context of this research that used narrative inquiry and thematic analysis to explore the question of spirituality within coping after earthquake trauma. Sixteen participants in Canterbury were purposefully recruited to have non-directed interviews that sought their personal stories of their spiritual or meaningful experiences in coping and recovery. Individual vignettes were constructed based on each of the participants' interviews and these were analysed for themes. The vignettes and analysis of the themes are presented in the following Results chapter.

Chapter 4

Results

"There are so many stories more beautiful than answers."

Mary *Oliver*

This research used Thematic Analysis to consider both the individual and collective perspectives of the participants and present the findings in two forms: first as narrative vignettes meant to capture the central content of each person's experience; and, then, as the major themes or elements running through a comparative analysis. I have chosen not to comment on the vignettes initially in order to let the participant's experience be the primary focus, allowing the reader to connect with each individual story as directly as possible.

Following the sixteen narratives, I outline the coding steps involved in the thematic analysis, which revealed four common themes or elements amongst the narratives. The names of the four emergent elements were created from language used by the participants. "Acceptance is a large part" as one participant noted, describes the first element, **Acceptance**, which is about settling into the situation and being in a non-blaming state. "We get to choose" or **Clarity and Choice**, refers to gaining clearer self-knowledge, and then assuming responsibility to make choices that align with personal values. "Reaching out to the world" or **Connection** reflects the importance of having and making meaningful connections. "Cosmic Something" or **Transcendence** pertains to aspects of experience that are outside the everyday physical reality such as God, energy/higher consciousness.

The structure of this chapter presents the sixteen participant vignettes, the coding process involved in the thematic analysis, the description of the four common elements, and a concluding summary.

4.1 Narrative Vignettes

All names in the following narratives are pseudonyms to adhere to confidentiality and protect the identity of the participants. I have used the original language of the participants as much as possible.

4.1.1 Spiritual Warrior

“I think I was prepared,” Molly stated. “Actually, I distinctly remember when that first earthquake happened I was not surprised – I was waiting for it.” She attributed this preparedness to a type of premonition she had about a month before the first earthquake. She was reading a book that included a story about Ruth Graham, the wife of Billy Graham, and her experience being in an earthquake in California. “That’s the first time I’ve ever really read about a domestic earthquake where you’re in a house, in a hallway and what could happen to you.” She went on to tell me that Ruth Graham was flung about the walls of her house as she tried to get to her two young daughters. The part that “locked and burned in my head” for Molly was the fact that Ruth Graham started praying out loud, thanking God for His protection, when she did get to her children. The comment in the book stated that the children recovered much more quickly than their friends who had screaming and terrified parents.

Molly remembers telling her husband, Jack, this story as they both scrambled to get to their own children during the September earthquake, eventually clinging on to them and each other as they endured the shaking. They both prayed aloud in very confident, clear voices “knowing that by doing so our two children would be protected, their spirits would be wrapped in the confidence that God was bigger than any earthquake.” She went on to say, “there was a very strong knowing that I could, and did, command angels to surround our little house as it shook so violently in the dark of the night”.

As the bright, sunny morning-after dawned, Molly noted the deafening silence of no bird song. Instead of being eerie, the profound relief of surviving the night and feeling the warmth and calm of the day felt “like a benediction and a promise – a promise that God had been with us and He would still be with us. It was very beautiful and is one of those ‘God Moments’ that has stayed with me.”

Despite the complete loss of Molly & Jack’s workspace and inventory in the September earthquake, the February event was worse for the wider destruction to the city of Christchurch and the loss of life. During this earthquake, Molly had an intense spiritual experience similar to two other times in her life when she faced death and illness of family members.

“As the earth shook, I started to howl and cry really loudly as though I was giving birth. I was pleading for God’s mercy. I didn’t know that this was the earthquake that would destroy people and my beautiful city and all the buildings that held the memories of my life. I had no idea of what was happening in Christchurch – we didn’t even know where the earthquake was – or the damage. It was my spirit that knew.”

She went on to describe this intense prayerful state. “It is as if I am fighting a spiritual battle and I even wave my arm as though I am holding a really large sword. It doesn’t last for long, and I can’t continue to pray like that when it lifts, but it feels, looking back, as though I had in some way been of use to God in a situation that was beyond anything I could do. I feel that God allowed me to intercede for Christchurch. That God had let me be a spiritual warrior.”

In addition to the premonition and the intense prayerful state, Molly did feel protected. “I do know God’s protection because I do know he protected us. And it can even be from when Jack was looking for a place to buy when he was a bachelor. He was either going to live right in the city or out in the country. And he looked at four places in the city – they’ve all been destroyed. He picked here because he used to come here for holidays as a boy. We happened to be on wind impacted sand, not estuary sand, in a little wooden box that shook.” Despite this sense of protection, she did wonder, “I have thought if we had lost absolutely everything, I’d still believe in God but I don’t know…it could’ve been harder.”

4.1.2 The Sensitive

Stephanie lives just outside Christchurch, having moved there with her husband two months before the September 2010 earthquake. A veteran of several earthquakes in New Zealand, she did not seem to be as affected as those who have lived in the area longer. Nonetheless, Stephanie did describe her experience of the February 22 earthquake in detail.

Her memory was of her strange behaviour. Stephanie was working in downtown Christchurch and was eating her lunch in the staff room when the Feb 22 earthquake hit. She remembers that the peels of her mandarin oranges had fallen out of the bag she had placed them in and she took the time to tidy them back up. Then as they were being marshalled out of the building, she went to collect her purse from her desk and paused to place the keyboard, which was swinging in the air, neatly back onto the desk. She noted wryly that upon their return to the office days later, not only were the keyboards out of place, but all of the desks were jumbled upon each other and had to be pried free.

Stephanie described the harrowing drive home after the February earthquake while several aftershocks continued to hit. “There was another violent shake. The car went up on two wheels that side; two wheels the other side and about a four-car length strip opened up on the left hand side beside me. It was not funny.” She remembered the worst part was that her husband was away, driving a coach tour and since she was new to town, she was alone.

She talked to me about her husband who she believes has very strong psychic ability. She recounted that he had placed “four Sentinels” on their property for protection. “Harold sees things. Oh yeah, very strong. That’s probably why we got together. We’re classed as soul mates, but also twin flames which is even closer.” Since the earthquakes, Stephanie feels she can see the Sentinels “patrolling out of the corner of my eye” and thinks, “it’s possible the earthquake was a catalyst…because I’ve never been able to see things, I get feelings, gut feelings, that sort of thing. All of those things got a lot stronger.”

In recounting her history with earthquakes in previous homes in Nelson, Wellington, Taranaki, and now Christchurch, she mused, “It’s really funny, so it’s never really bothered me but other people really freak.” She puts this down to her spiritual heritage. “My mother was really spiritual so I was brought up with that sort of spiritual thing of being just aware. That’s natural. The way I was brought up with her spirituality, it’s just natural, normal.”

4.1.3 You Never Recover

Of all the participants, Jane used the most graphic language and tone of voice when describing the impacts of the earthquakes – she used the word "hideous" nine times, as well as "disgusting" "shock" and repeated the sentiment that "you never get over it" several times. She became the most animated when describing the little home she lived in at the time, which was built on piles. It moved and settled during the earthquake but did not sustain serious damage, even though several houses and businesses around her, did. Part of her horror was realizing that other people could not get back to their homes, which she felt would be unbearable "because it's your home...like it's my nest really."

Juxtaposed with her sense of horror, was the importance of two things: keeping her business running; and, ongoing relationships. The fact that her livelihood was threatened meant she ignored the police and assessors and immediately got into her building to clean it up and reopen for business ten days later. Her focus became getting on with things and getting back to business, an approach not shared by one of her young employees. Being upset about the earthquakes, the young girl came to work late one day and was met with a stern message from Jane which she thought imparted a strong life lesson, "Just because you've been in an earthquake doesn't mean you're not going to go to work."

Jane's story mentions her adult children, grandchildren, employees, customers, a new partner, and business associates. When her business was closed immediately after the first earthquake, she realized the important social function it played for her and in the community, "suddenly you've lost that social contact, it is social contact." In addition to the customers, she deeply appreciated the contact of her insurance broker in Wellington who called her on the weekend, and the directors of her franchise, who made a special visit to see how she was faring after the earthquake.

Finally, Jane also described her luck in meeting Rick who she now lives with, but only got to know during the clean up after the first earthquake. On a date night before the February quake, they had parked near the Town Hall right up against the concrete wall and she remembers saying casually, "If we had an earthquake right now, we'd probably get killed." She went on to explain to me that she thinks she is a bit "hard-hearted, tough and casual". Even though she does not think you ever get over the earthquakes, there is no point in dwelling on it, "It's nature."

4.1.4 Nature is the Answer

Helen is a journalist but liked the opportunity of being on the other side of an interview for a change. She started her story "at the beginning" of the first earthquake. She remembers going back to bed once the "forty seconds of rollercoaster ride" had stopped and seemed bemused that it had not occurred to her to check on other people. As she and her husband walked about town the following day she noted it was uncharacteristic that neither of them pitched in to help the clean-up, "we were just so gobsmacked by the destruction that the last thing we wanted to do was help anyone." From this "great feeling of helplessness", Helen went on to describe her desperate need to help and how she did so by becoming one of a team of earthquake support coordinators.

Helen described how there was a feeling of cockiness after that first earthquake – "we New Zealanders, we knew how to build for earthquakes! We were so full of ourselves." She noted that she eventually became inured to the quakes and aftershocks, but also angry "I wanted to fight." She confessed that she misses the earthquakes "I did miss them, because you got an adrenalin rush, you really do – the adrenalin, you know that's why I love to fight." She went on to recount several situations she dealt with in her coordinator role and the challenges that surfaced in dealing with insurance companies and EQC (the Earthquake Commission). People on both sides trying to take advantage or wield power led to deep disenchantment with the process "I was getting a bit cynical…the whole system had gone pear-shaped."

So busy fighting, Helen told me she did not have time to grieve over the past five or six years. This vulnerability came out during our interview as she cried when talking about friends she could not bring herself to contact as she felt so hopeless and helpless for their situation. When recounting her son and daughter-in-law visiting and experiencing the Boxing Day earthquake, tears came as she remembered feeling protective of her family "I am better at coping when I'm by myself. It was awful, it was awful because there were a lot of people there…It's when you see the reaction of other people…" She clearly identified her favoured problem-solving coping approach, "You feel powerless when you haven't got a way of addressing your situation, or you are working in a way where you are doing things, I felt that I had contributed in some way, always trying to move things forward. And I think that's a way of coping, a very important way of coping, very positive."

Yet when I asked about how she coped within herself during this time of chaos, Helen's body language and tone softened. "I learnt pretty early on in the piece that it didn't matter how much the earth shook, every day you woke up and the sun was always strong, every forest still there, a lot of fences and road cones and stickers on buildings, but the sky and the earth and the trees were all there." She went on to talk of being an avid gardener, "I mean I just lose myself in my garden and nature is very important to me and I couldn't bear not to go outside every day. I walk, I love the outdoors. I've sailed, I've skied – I love the outdoors. I think nature is the answer. I think I'm not a spiritual person, but to me I would find a forest far more spiritual than a church. I'd only be in a church to look at the art, but certainly in a forest – ahhh – all the splendour of nature. I just think it's wonderful and it's very healing. "

She went on to wonder at the Cosmos. "So really, planet Earth, just the life of planet Earth, it is just such an amazing thing, isn't it? God!... I'm very easily moved by visual beauty in the outdoors, very much so. If I ever felt really ghastly, I would go outside…Something to do with looking at the distance, looking at the bigger picture, like looking at the mountains. It sort of like puts everything in perspective…the whole idea of planet Earth and the Sun and the Moon – it's been here for so long. That to me is a huge source of replenishment of the soul, if you want to call it a soul."

4.1.5 Embodiment & Energy

Maria works as a practitioner of energy-based Alternative Therapies since the earthquakes. Prior to that, she worked as a nurse and then massage therapist at the time of the first earthquake. The September earthquake hit the morning after she returned from her father's funeral, interrupting the personal grieving process she was hoping to do. Her life immediately focused on assisting her children and dealing with her post-quake damaged home. She did not consciously realize how frozen her emotions had become, "I was on autopilot of fight/flight, so my body, my nerves - they were on edge. They were in a chronic condition of being tense." When a large bug landed on her shoulder as she was hanging clothes on the line outside, she violently wrenched her body in fear, causing a severe injury to her shoulder joint. She was in constant pain and unable to work for eight months, now processing not only the grief from the loss of her father and other family dynamics, but also facing the question "who am I if I can't work?"

In this convalescence period, which spanned the rest of the earthquake sequence, Maria decided to act on her belief that "you can become the victim of a circumstance or the victor." Throughout the healing of her shoulder, grieving for her father, experiencing the earthquakes, and fighting with EQC and insurance over her crumbling home, Maria chose to define herself from a position of strength, "I'm an innately worthy person despite how the world is showing up", and, "what I am in control of is how I manage myself in this situation."

To help her manage, she tuned into how she was holding stress in her body. She recognized that when another earthquake or aftershock happened, she would feel the adrenalin even after the event had stopped. She saw she had a choice, stating, "I could still feel things in my body. Now I could have ignored that or shut it down or I could be present to is. So I was choosing to be present to it, to breathe into it, to open into it and to release it." She saw this process as "learning to listen to my body with my heart."

Maria moved deeper into meditation, saying, "I would tune into Source and get these amazing moments of guidance." At one point, a new set of spirit guides appeared to her during a meditation and introduced her to the esoteric concept of "Light Language" – which she explains as a universal language made up of tones and movement meant to communicate love. She now uses Light Language and energy with her clients, which she describes as working with a person's energy field by perceiving this through her hands. This

approach was developed from courses within her massage therapy training such as Polarity Therapy and Reiki, as well as through her own intuitive understanding.

She continues to work with embodiment, which is recognizing stress and fear in her own body, as well as that in her clients. In workshops and individual sessions, she teaches people to "connect to your breath. Breathe in, receiving and filling up. Start to notice what's in your body. Know that you've got an access to energy that can help you move what's being held in your body." The other practice Maria teaches is developing a connection to "Source", which she encourages people to do by looking in nature. She sees this as a spiritual practice anyone can do by "learning to trust that innate power within you to hold you no matter what is happening around you...It is not based on a religion; it's based on a connection. Everybody can connect…take your breath there and you'll open to the energy."

4.1.6 Pinball Enlightenment

Toni initially described a sense of complacency after the first earthquake – the feeling that her family and community had "dodged a bullet", which left them unprepared for the rest of the earthquake sequence as they "thought we'd done it, other than the Alpine Fault, we thought we'd had the big one." Then February 22 came, which Toni described as an "I thought I was going to die quake." As she worked on the fourth floor of a downtown building during this earthquake, she experienced everything as intense and happening in slow motion, "I can remember watching the cracks go up the wall and thinking 'holy crap this is it!'" All she could think of was getting to her son who was at school a block from the beach – she was afraid of a tsunami. "I guess it's that moment when you go your own life doesn't even actually matter, it doesn't matter, you just go. I know that sounds a bit dramatic, but that's actually what it was really like, it was as if to say I don't care if there's a fricken big wave coming at me, it doesn't matter, I've got to do everything I can to get to my son."

She described being sheltered from all that was taking place in the other parts of Christchurch and feeling gratitude for that, "it allowed us to just cope with what we had to deal with, which was pretty significant." Her community banded together to look after each other and survive this primitive period of having no services such as water, power or even bridges to get out of the suburb. "We were just kind of in it...we were literally just, we weren't thinking very far ahead because everything was still moving, we were still having massive shakes. And so you were just kind of doing your own thing."

Toni went on to describe this feeling of suspended motion over the duration of the quake sequence – "it didn't stop shaking for years…we were just sitting waiting for another one." She noted that her house and garage were "trashed" several times, to the point that "there was nothing left to fall down." So coping at this point was about being "pragmatic, prepared and … ready" and yet accepting, "it was just Mother Nature."

She suggested that Christchurch has changed for the better. "People who have been through it all now just have this acceptance, a gratitude – they know in their heart of hearts, and I know in my heart of hearts, that it literally could all be over in a split second and so there's no time to be grumpy and shitty and mean." She went on to attribute this "kinder, better" change as not being about "God directing things", but rather "a universal energy that we can

all tap in to…People who have been through it all are more tolerant, are more adaptable…it was as if Mother Earth was transferring her energy to us so that we could use it."

Sitting in her garage work studio preparing stock for an upcoming show, Toni feels she has found her pathway. She used the analogy of a pinball machine pinging her in the direction of following her passion – a "spiritual awakening and enlightenment". At one point, she "realized it could all be over in a second, what the hell am I doing wasting my time and my life and talents doing this bullshit when my true passion is here?". She went on to say that it is about making a conscious choice, "you owe it, not just to yourself, but to everybody else, to do something that makes you really happy and to contribute."

She sees what happened in Christchurch as a gift even amidst the death and grieving she witnessed in her friends who lost loved ones. "It doesn't mean there's no grief, but there is a way of getting meaning. In a bizarre sense, having some gratitude around that…if you can detach yourself from your own victimhood and tragedy that offers you a sense of perspective. And from that perspective you can actually then make choices."

4.1.7 Kindness Mission

The directions Elizabeth gave me to her home in a suburb just outside of Christchurch were easy to follow. After giving me a partial tour and explanation of the layout of this new house she designed and built after the earthquakes, she ushered me into the living room.

As we settled into our seats on couches facing each other, she talked about the battles she encountered on the way to moving into this new home. “They went into receivership,” she said about the original builder. “Gave me a new company who took one look at me and thought ‘here’s a little old lady with grey hair, she’ll be a pushover’. But this little old lady – I actually sold real estate in the 80’s, built the house that was damaged in the 90’s, I had all my real estate exams, I had my building exams - I knew, and it was just a battle the whole time.”

The fight for a new home was just one of a series of challenges piled upon her after the earthquakes. Being forced from a picturesque neighbourhood along the river with a son and daughter and grandchildren nearby, as well as long-time friends, to being diagnosed with a rare form of cancer, to mourning the death of friends and her brother, she confided to me, “Yeah I sometimes think, ahhh, not another thing…”.

Elizabeth told me it was when she was diagnosed with cancer that her spirituality came in. She always had a “Christian faith” she said but it came in stronger at this point. “I started praying a lot more again. I had this calmness about me – this was God’s way and not to be my way…I was really sad about the whole thing, but I just accepted it.”

She went on to say that she had a good friend who also had cancer that acted like a mentor to her. She remembered her advice “to wake up every morning and thank God you’re alive and celebrate your day.” The funeral for this dear friend, whose attitude was such an inspiration, was the previous week. She mused to me, “I wonder without some sort of belief that there is an afterlife, a belief that these things happen for a very good reason and we don’t always know why, and without that strong belief, I think it would be very hard to cope with all these things that have happened.”

Elizabeth described herself as one of four “Red Zone Refugees” – a group of women who all had to leave their beloved neighbourhood after the earthquakes. For all of them the sense of deep loss remained, “this panging for ***** Road still.” She expressed impatience for

those who do not honour this grief and expect her and others to “be over it now.” She explained her analogy of this grieving process, “My answer to that is if you can tell me what being over it is, I’m all over it. It’s as if you are allowed a certain amount of time with any grief situation. You know there is a sort of ladder you climb up and you climb down again. But then in the meantime you get triggers that will send you backwards or forwards or whatever.”

She revealed to me that her practice of praying every morning and looking for something nice in the day had actually led her to a somewhat surprising realization. “I think it also taught me to be kind to myself.” She went on to describe the luxury of taking a day for herself when she was “feeling poorly”, as a way of re-energizing herself to be able to tend others. She sees her five children, fourteen grandchildren, her “Red Zone Refugees”, and her new friends as part of her work in the world now: “God’s given me this mission in life – to be available to other people.”

4.1.8 Higher Consciousness

“A lot of people died - for five years we were burying people”, Sarah sighed as she explained that not everyone died exactly on the day of the February 22 earthquake. Since this toll included several people closest to her heart, such as her mother and son, she went on to describe what she felt helped her survive – a six-week state of heightened consciousness, without which “I wouldn’t still be alive now.” This state was similar to when she meditates and moves into another space, but was more intense and not a conscious action on her part, “It just enveloped my everything…it was like I was living inside this way of being and way of seeing.”

Sarah tried to convey the experience by describing two aspects of it. Her mother had a stroke on the day of the last earthquake and lingered, partially paralysed for two and a half years. “She couldn’t move her whole left side but she could speak and play scrabble with me. I’d go into her room with her and she’d say ‘I can see they’re all around me’. Like my Dad who died and her Mom and she’d say, ‘They’re all here.’ I could see them all too – I was with her there, they all were.” She then talked about how she related differently to nature, “And then the behaviour of birds and animals, yeah, I think they behave like this all the time - I don’t think it’s unusual – I think, um, my awareness of them was heightened.”

Speaking of nature led her to talk about her love of the South Island of New Zealand. “This island is an amazing place – it is the beauty place of the Gods. Every different landform is on this island - the island itself is a sacred island. I can’t really live off it – my brothers and sisters live all over the world and I don’t know how they do it.” She appreciated how the poet/musician Leonard Cohen shared this sense of enchantment at his last concert in Christchurch. “He said, ‘you guys live in this place, on this island, that’s magical and anything can happen here and it does! And you walk around like it’s ordinary and have porridge for breakfast and cups of tea.’ And we have to walk around like it’s ordinary and have porridge for breakfast and cups of tea because it is utterly extraordinary in the ordinary.”

Sarah then talked more about Christchurch and her sense that there has been a “profound shift in consciousness.” She feels that the earthquakes are Mother Earth doing her dance trying to “bring the Feminine through.” She tied this to her observation that amongst all the buildings that fell in the earthquakes, existing grottos of “Our Lady” which were hidden behind the convents and churches, stayed standing. “Our Lady – she never fell down. And all

the statues of the men fell down, not even Queen Victoria, they all fell down (laughs heartily). The earthquakes … She's just coming through you know."

Related to this was an incident with one of her staff. He was a camera operator taking footage of the earthquake destruction but kept returning to film the one turret of the Catholic Cathedral that hadn't collapsed and had the statue of Mary in the window. "I sat him down and said 'J – what happened?' And he said, 'Sarah – she appeared to me.' And I said, 'ah, okay.' And he said, 'I'm not a Catholic, I'm not a Christian, I'm not anything but she appeared to me.' And ten days later, in the paper, the bell ringer said, 'we had a statue of Our Lady and she was facing inwards and she turned around during the February 22 earthquake and she faced out over the city.' So that's the Feminine talking through Otautahi Christchurch."

Figure 8: Statue of Mary turned to face outward in the Catholic Cathedral, Christchurch (Source: from https://www.christchurchdailyphoto.com/2011/05/30/virgin-mary-photo-frame/ with permission from Michelle Sullivan)

As a creative person, Sarah takes what has happened to her since the earthquakes into all her projects – books, plays, films. She sees her pre and post-earthquake works as having to do with this shift to Feminine energy. "This is clear as a bell now. We're speaking into the world and it's in people's hearts and minds to shift so profoundly." She feels it is her

responsibility to the world and to herself as an artist to hold space for this shift and express it in her work. “Because that’s the mahi (work) we have here, it comes through and I’ve just got to let it come through me. Otherwise, I couldn’t cope – I have to let it come through and be true to it. That’s all it asks and it’s everything really that it asks. And that’s all right because that’s where the joy lies and the stillness.”

4.1.9 The Call

Stephen, the only minister in this study, was asked to move to Christchurch by his church. He wryly noted, “So we came about six months before the first earthquake after having lived in Wellington for nine years and expecting a huge earthquake any day. And then coming to Christchurch and thinking they don’t have earthquakes in Christchurch, so gave away our emergency kit to our son.“ He and his wife were reluctant to make the move south, as a number of personal factors seemed to indicate it was more important for them to remain in Wellington. However, within six months, “all of those objections were kind of ticked off” so they made the change.

Stephen observed his congregation after the earthquakes and noted, “What people found particularly hard was that life was out of control. For some people, professional type people who are very used to being in control of their space, to suddenly being in an environment where things were out of control and unpredictable, some people found it very hard to cope.” He noted the “fight or flight response” in some people, “So some of those people who you thought would cope the best, they would just have to leave. Some people you thought ‘gosh – they’ll never cope with this – and they coped brilliantly.’ So it wasn’t a kind of rational response.” He thought some people did develop an appreciation that “just because you have spirituality, doesn’t necessarily mean you won’t go through difficult times.”

Personally, the earthquakes gave Stephen a sense that he was called to Christchurch for a purpose. “So when the first earthquake came our response was well we really must be in the right place. We must be supposed to be here in this season to help people, so this is why we’re here, so let’s get on and do it.” He was proud of how all the Churches came together to reach out to all sectors of the city by going door to door, ensuring people were physically safe – a process that was only coming to completion five years on. He recognized this and individual outreach activities in his own area as “an expression of spirituality in terms of just trying to provide a connection and sense of community.”

He found that his own values came into sharper focus. “When you know that people have been killed in the earthquakes, you just want to be intentional about how you live your life. It’s important to have a priority on relationships – no one comes to the end of their life and wishes they’d spent more time at the office or had another $10,000 in the bank or whatever

it might be. It made me think about priorities." He went on to say that he had to guard against impatience with people who had not yet developed this sense of intentionality. "I just have to remind myself that every person has to work that out for themselves, and you can try and encourage people and inspire people, but at the end of the day, people are responsible for their own decisions."

Stephen saw hope for moving forward and having a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving as key to the benefits of spirituality. He referenced the Mental Health Foundation's "Five Ways of Wellbeing" which he has presented to his congregation. He thinks, "Spirituality provides some insights into those areas that are really important for good mental and emotional health and wellbeing. Otherwise, you just feel kind of trapped. Uncertainty as I said, the unpredictability, how do you live?"

4.1.10 No Fear

When I asked Sam at the beginning of the interview about religious affiliation, his response was "purely spiritual." He sees his spirituality as a type of courage "I've never lived what I would class a life of fear, so that gave me a huge advantage with dealing with the actual earthquakes and afterwards." He witnessed his family and friends "fall to pieces" but felt lucky that "I was internally strong enough, I think that was my spirituality, to help a lot of people."

He lost his grandfather and mother after the earthquakes and is currently dealing with his father's recent cancer diagnosis, so recognizes that life has been "really tough". He does not fear earthquakes, ascribing them to "Mother Nature doing her thing" and credits his construction background for understanding the inevitability of the quakes happening in Christchurch – a city "built on a swamp."

Sam was thinking of getting out of construction project management, which he had done for twenty-three years but was not clear what the next steps would be. The earthquakes acted as a catalyst for him, "the earthquakes struck and then I knew I wanted to work with renewable energy." He went on to research solar energy and start a company that helps give people choices for their power, eventually winning an industry award in his business category. He likened the change in his life to a jigsaw puzzle that's now made, "I think the earthquake has definitely been a big push for the final stages of finding yourself, yeah, and seeing the big picture of how it works, and exactly what I'm here to do, why I'm meant to be here, and what I'm doing. "

He went on to note that he has changed his priorities in life. Previously, "it was all about materialistic things. I've moved away from that and it doesn't mean anything to me now." He is excited about social enterprise projects he is involved in that promote affordable building and living that is kinder to the earth. He sees that "because I've raised my consciousness so much, which means I've raised my vibrational level, I've attracted so many like-minded people around me… who are trying to make a difference, make change."

Sam sees his coping ability as, "I need to change my thinking or I need to look at something different, I just do it…the answers are always inside you, you have to trust yourself and just believe. And ask – the answer will always come."

4.1.11 The Art of Spirituality

Vincent is an artist who used to run a street church and still creates public installations that are free for people to "engage in whatever way they want". He feels that people are hungry for spirituality but suspicious of religion and so sees his art as a way of offering accessible "spirituality that has to have no ulterior motives." The word he used is transparent "it is what it is, nothing else."

After the earthquakes, he decided to construct a memorial of chairs to help his friend and others who were grieving the loss of a loved one. He recounted the urgency he felt, the need to do something immediately for the community. "There was a boy, about twelve, who would cycle over every day and just sit there talking to his mother. When I hear that we can't have a memorial for five or six years because we can't rush into it because we need to make sure it fits the need – well, he needed something straight away – no good when he was eighteen."

The chair memorial became an active way for people to process their grief. Vincent got people to hand paint the chairs they brought in commemoration. "It's that hands on thing in a totally powerless situation. Strangely enough, like the earthquake, there's no one to blame. So they'll just sit there and paint a chair, think about it, take some time." Others respond to the painted chairs – especially the wheelchair. "We had a number of people comment about the wheelchair saying it speaks to them the most – they've been crippled by the earthquakes." He says, "There is the aspect of spirituality transcends." He sees the chair installation helping people with grief from any situation. "It transcends the earthquakes because it's now about loss and loss is universal."

From loss, Vincent moved to joy as being part of spirituality. He recognized the new Margaret Mahy Playground in Christchurch as "the most sacred space. There's a mystery, there's a wonder, nothing expected except just to play and that is for all ages. In some ways, spirituality and play are quite linked. I think we lose our ability to play about when we lose our spirituality and vice versa…That's why organized religion is suffering, it's too serious and there's not an awful lot of joy in it."

He also reflected on spirituality in nature. "If you ask New Zealanders where do they feel closest to God – whatever God may mean – they will say the mountains, the river, the bush, in the trees and the forest. At the change of the millennium, people would be at the West

coast and see it ending and then race over to the East coast to see it rise. They were outside on the beach – they didn't see the millennium in a church, they went to nature."

Ultimately, Vincent thinks people intuitively know and need to be in the present. "The one thing people are looking for after the earthquakes, they're looking for this huge step forward where the big moment is – nothing has happened - it's the ordinary. Life slowed down afterwards – it's not the case now, but it certainly did and that was actually really important."

He ended with an analogy of how spirituality can help a person with pain and suffering. "One of the things I do with art is I make very large-scale pieces – five meters by ten. The thing with the paper is, you get the flax and you chop it all up, and you boil it, and you wash it, and you feed it through a waste disposal unit at the table, and you whiz it in kitchen whizzers until it's very fine, and you throw it in a pond, and you drag it through to make the paper out of it. For the flax – it goes through hell, but you finish up with something that's one hundred percent pure flax. There's no other added thing in it – it is one hundred percent itself. That's what spirituality does: it makes you one hundred percent yourself."

4.1.12 Going Away to Come Home

Marie started her story by viewing the earthquakes as an overall positive shake up."It ruffled things up and you didn't take anything for granted, you weren't so complacent and overall that's a good thing. It brings you back to life, it wakes you up and it puts priority to the things that you might normally assume are always there."

She went on to detail how incredibly difficult life was after the February 22 earthquake – their house was broken, her husband lost his job, she developed anxiety, and she was conscious of how children, both her own and the ones in her art classes were affected. Her initial way of coping was to "talk to people. Talk to other people because I wasn't alone. That was the best part – we weren't alone. We were all going through it. We had cups of tea that brought the community together. Parents talked to other parents about how the children were coping, so we had something in common, probably more so than ever before."

To deal with the anxiety, Marie sought counselling and acupuncture which helped but made things worse at one point. "I was a complete and utter mess – it took it deeper. Which surprised me – and that was another thing to live with 'what's happening here - I didn't know that was all buried underneath!' So if you were brave enough to confront and tried to get to the root of the problem, you usually recovered quicker." Her mother and other friends died during this time and she was clear on the depth of loss she was dealing with – "loss of a city, loss of working in the same way, loss of wellbeing."

In addition to the art classes she ran for children, Marie was an internationally known artist but the demand for art stopped after the earthquake. "I wanted to go a bit faster and make the most of anything in my life, so I packed up the kids and went to my roots – to Scotland. I felt an urgency to connect with the world beyond my insular little world that it had become. I felt I had to really get my courage back to reach further."

Upon her return from Scotland, Marie knew she had to reinvent herself. "It was very clear to me that I needed a place to work outside the broken house. I realized that part of the anxiety was living with all that damage and seeing it every single day when I woke up in the morning, and that being my reality. I didn't want to be reminded of it, I wanted to move forward." She made the decision to take on a commercial lease to use as a studio. "I had this sanctuary where I could think straight … and a venue, neutral place for people to come, with whatever I offered for the children and anything else that evolved out of that."

She feels that this new life after the earthquakes added another dimension of creativity. “As an artist, I am creating and experimenting all the time. It’s not like a recipe I follow and you do it like this and the whole world understands. I’m presenting something that they try out – like even the way I teach children and I love that. So having the earthquakes on top of that is a double whammy – it’s like you’re experimenting with two realities.”

She sees this as “strengthening but also scary. It was a balance of taking a risk and believing, totally believing in it on my own.” While the economic reality meant art was not selling locally and tourism was down, she held fast to her contribution to the community, which gave her hope. “I’ve found a way to work on the healing front. If I can offer my belief and support in that way to the community – which I know is in demand – I can continue being here. Just believing art is a healing therapeutic activity and by doing it, it helps people to get more in touch with their intuition and their own spiritual path.”

Overall, Marie said about the earthquakes, “You just learn to accept it and move on.” She went on to note that people in Christchurch had changed for the better “we’re more empathetic, more courageous and we know how to recover from a trauma that’s not been about one person, it’s about a whole community.” Even so, she returned to her need to go outside Canterbury to connect. “It just reminds you that not everyone is living like us, recovering from something and trying to carry on. You come back with a new lease on life. When you do have a break, you come back with new energy and new enthusiasm and perspective on how to live here again. I think there is a huge loyalty thing because we have shared something in common. It’s brought us to a very special place – I suppose that has a spiritual quality to it.”

Marie sees the earthquakes as an equalizer of sorts. “We all are the same. It’s not that outer picture that you build up, the status, the recognition you get from what you’ve got. We have no control over the earth and what it does to us. And we’re all in the same boat. If you weren’t living that way and weren’t aware that security is not in what you have, then you suddenly realized it. And that’s a very big shift. It’s a spiritual awakening. Because if you lose everything, who are you?”

4.1.13 The Fish Eyeball Moment

Megan described an event during the first earthquake that for her was "kind of weird". "That morning, during the whole shaky thing, I kinda knew it was an earthquake but I just stayed in bed, half-asleep, and then I hear what I thought was my flatmate call my name to get me out of bed. She's a kiwi, she knows the drill of what we're supposed to do. So then I hear my name called out again, so I thought I better get up this time, and I opened the door, thinking that my roommate was going to be there on the other side, but she wasn't." She went on to tell me that she was not "brought up in a religious environment. We're all been brought up in science with what you see is what you know, the safe thing." The incident still sticks in her mind and makes her uncomfortable for not being able to explain it.

She moved on from that once the second earthquake happened. Since she was out of town visiting her mother north of Christchurch, she did not have the immediate, forceful experience that others had and initially felt guilt over this. "I had this survivor guilt. Even though my flat broke, my workplace building broke - I took voluntary redundancy because there was nowhere for me to go – I felt like a fraud. I wasn't there at the time therefore I'm kind of fake. Fake kind of earthquake casualty."

This fraudulent state ended when she encountered the reality of being without a job post-quake. "For me to go on the dole was absolutely soul destroying. I did not want to be on it. There were hundreds, thousands of people in Christchurch unemployed, no jobs and nowhere to go." To escape this situation, Megan took a job managing the fish counter at a supermarket, which meant she got to stay until 10pm cleaning up.

One night as she scraped fish parts off the bench, she had a moment of intense clarity. "This eyeball comes off one of the fish and does this slow-motion roll across the counter. So there I am looking at this fish eyeball rolling toward me, it was real clear – I've never had such a moment of clarity – 'I don't want to be here. There is more to life. I need to be doing something more.'" Within a week, she had moved on to a more professional job and then went back to University eventually getting a postgraduate degree.

Megan decided, "The earthquake stuffed up the city, there's no real work, now is as good a time as any to do something with my life and take this opportunity." In retrospect, she realized the earthquakes as a good thing, "If it hadn't been for the earthquakes, it was a

shock way to do it, but it started the ball, the whole chain thing, the mind getting out of retail and although it was up and down afterwards, it was a good purpose to it."

She sees herself now as a changed person. "You kind of realize what's important. I used to love shopping and buying stuff – I liked the latest technology. I don't feel like I need stuff anymore, it's not important. Stuff is not the way to be happy. I get a lot more meaning about experiences, the people I am with, what we do, where we go. I just try and enjoy the little things in life – spending time with people you actually care about. I don't want to waste my time with people who are grumpy and miserable, there are other people I would rather be spending my time with. So I try and get rid of all the negative people in my life and just focus on the good ones."

4.1.14 Focus

Anna works as a psychic, giving readings that often become counselling or coaching sessions. As she was sweeping up glass in her house after the first earthquake, she said to herself, “It starts.” She was a bit startled by the phrase but immediately knew it was correct, “I knew I was in the right place at the right time for the right reasons. And then everything from that moment on seemed to fit. It was as though the path was sort of wobbly – like previously – and now it just came into focus. And from that point I made definite attempts to organize my work with a purpose: that was to illuminate people, illuminate on themselves, not anything material, majorly eventful or dramatic, just telling them who and what they were.”

She described being raised by grandparents and parents who belonged to the Theosophical Society, which led her definitely away from religion. She said, “Spirituality for me is the whole of life. It’s all about emotional focus. Cease to be purely intellectual – you do this right because socially it makes life easier sort of focus – to being wholly involved and believing.” She went on to describe her “Pick and Mix” beliefs – a bit of Buddhism, Hinduism, and other bits: “we call them ancient wisdoms, metaphysics – they’ve been around in many forms, they’ve permeated religion, they’ve been kicked out of religions but they persist. They could be called ground level or grass roots or nature beliefs.”

After the quakes, Anna felt clearer in the direction of her work, saying “there was cementation in my focus.” She became aware of future disasters and she and other colleagues noticed an uptake in clients having that same sense. “We had those people come to us from many walks of life. Extraordinarily, some of them had status or were in quite commanding positions. It was not unusual to get someone like that sitting down and saying ‘Right, when’s the big one?’ These were people who would not normally seek out people like us.” Others would tell her of visions or their intuition around future events. “Those sort of comments just out of the blue. Which to me all proves that there is an underground dialogue going on which pops up through fissures every now and again and then disappears.” She felt that this spirituality was flowing and increasing in Christchurch. “The quakes became the grease through which people were seeking themselves and meaning.”

The knowledge of future difficult events in the lives of clients was not always comfortable for Anna, “I didn’t like the responsibility. I am a firm believer that one is in the right place for the right reasons and it’s their choice, they don’t need me organizing or telling them anything.”

As part of her own spiritual practice, Anna relies on doing Qi Gong - an Eastern form of exercise that incorporates breathing, movement and meditation meant to strengthen the body's "chi" or life energy. It was as she settled into her Qi Gong meditation one day after the earthquakes that she noticed the presence of a new spirit guide. "I knew, I sort of recognized him as important and immediately my energy got a little frisson through it. And that was a confirmation of sorts, I can't put it into words, but it was a confirmation of sorts." She knew that the presence of this guide, who continues to appear, was serious and "meant I had to stick to the pathway in my work. No deviating, no backing off, no fluffing." Ultimately, she found this comforting, "I do like to have a job. I like to have a reason for being here."

4.1.15 Dogs and Connection

“I couldn’t have got through it without my dogs,” Amy stated. At the time of the first earthquake, she had one dog who seemed to predict major earthquakes, not wanting to let them out of the house on days that eventually held aftershocks or quakes over 4.0. She marvelled at animals’ knowingness, “Dogs know. Sheep, horses, cows know before we do.” It was Amy’s strong connection to animals that made her sympathetic to those who could not find places to live that would accommodate pets after the earthquake. “So they’ve just gone through this horrifying experience when they need their pets the most and they’re not allowed them (her eyes welling up). It made me so angry. That hit me really hard. I would be in a paddock with a tent before I would give up my personal dogs.”

Her tears came again when talking about how it took an earthquake to get communities to start working together again. “I come from a rural background and you ask your neighbour for a cup of sugar or you get help or whatever. We had these lovely little old ladies and nobody had checked on them other than us! Nobody knew if they were okay, their family hadn’t even checked on them.” This did change in her local neighbourhood and “everybody kind of worked together for a little bit. Did start checking on their neighbours and start asking how they were and learning each other’s routines.” A benefit of the earthquakes was that it “forced us to go backwards and live a bit simply and connect with other people around us.”

Amy worked for a rescue company at the time and found it helpful to throw herself into work. She concentrated on the practicalities of living in an earthquake zone but found that “I got out into nature as much as possible. When I needed a break, it would be take the dogs for a walk, go somewhere pretty, into nature a little bit more. It made me keen to move rural.” She saw connecting to nature, having a sense of community, and sense of belonging as spiritual activities that are key to her coping and part of the rural lifestyle she eventually adopted. Besides accepting that she lives in an earthquake prone country, she also believes in nature and subscribes to a quote from Anne Frank “I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles.”

4.1.16 Living Spiritual in a Material World

"The first one I would have called a near death experience – I mean I thought I was going to die," Paul explained as a way of beginning his story. He went on to note that the first earthquake helped him realize what was happening during the February 22nd one but it did not prepare him for the extent of physical damage to the city and his neighbourhood. "On a day to day basis, you know, not quite survival but living a real basic life – that was a real shock."

The personal physical discomfort he experienced quickly took a back seat to a new way of thinking about other people. "I had a 'them and us' mentality about all sorts of things. Even from sport, Auckland was always the enemy to Canterbury and here was all these Aucklanders just pouring it out from their hearts. Then the attention from the whole world. And farmers all arrived in town with their tractors, and the students who you know, they're often a bit of a pain, but here they were coming and offering to dig out your plot and all that. It made me stop and think about a lot of my attitudes. So that changed me quite a bit – it really gave me a sense of community."

Another insight Paul had was a sense of vulnerability. "I thought this is the first event I've experienced in my life where I've ever been sort of insecure, physically. I've been insecure in other ways but physically, thinking 'wow, this is much bigger than any of us can handle.' It brought home to me how my parents had lived through the depression and the war. I gained sort of a pure respect for how they faced challenges and how easy our generation has had it."

After the earthquakes, Paul found his attitude at work changed for the positive, "I became much more progressive" which was not the norm in his combative industry. From relocating the office and dealing with new corporate neighbours to seeing the need to find creative ways of dealing with conflict, he found himself challenged at work which all led to "a bit of a personal enlightenment." He was persuaded by his boss and another colleague to attend the Self Realization Meditation Centre for work supervision issues at a time that "was a real low point for me." He struggled initially but eventually "I had to sort of front up. And I thank it all now for having happened."

The Centre introduced him to the idea of healing energy, which he was surprised to find "really rang true." He tried to explain how he reacted to a healing session, "I can see colours

but I think I live in black or white or something – I'm not quite sure. But then after this healing, when I was driving home the trees you know, I'm still thinking in the material, but yeah, wow, something is here." He found himself "becoming more reflective and all of the walls in my life were being broken down. Even the simple things like 'townies' 'real estate agents' 'union' – it was all coming back to people – the most important thing."

At this point, Paul was still struggling "because of my religious background because I had rejected my Catholicism, I hadn't just drifted off, I had literally rejected it." Through all of the reading, counselling, healing, and meditation, he had a deep realization "If I was a Catholic I'd say I'd got my faith back. It was a belief in something bigger than myself. It was something spiritual." He tried to describe it, "I still remember the moment when I sort of got the belief back because it was a choice. I had chosen to leave Catholicism and God. I sort of thought that was really appalling in Christchurch – it was so much bigger than us – like you thought 'oh okay, is that a geyser outside my house?' Like you walk onto the road and here's this giant geyser of mud and a hundred tons of stuff in the back…you can't control everything. I mean other people need, at this point, something bigger than us, you know."

Paul continued to struggle with the words, not wanting to use God for its connotation to religion. "I'm still not sure what to call that thing. I tend to think of higher energy or a cosmic something. But I have no doubt that there is a spiritual part of us that is the higher part of us." He went on to say how he uses this new knowledge on a practical level. "I can use that in my work. If I just go to a meeting and – (holds his hands in the prayer pose in front of him) – surround it in light. It helps and you get better outcomes."

Despite the profound affect this enlightenment has had on him, he does not find living this new way necessarily easy. "The opportunity to sort of try and live a life which I still think is really very difficult, a spiritual life in a material world, it's so hard because it's just, people are not there most of the time." He sees himself as fortunate for having had that link to the Centre, "I think I'd still be in that sense of lost. Just having that thing that I'm going to lift myself to my higher self. You can only get peace from that side of things. You can't actually get it from all the other stuff the world sort of tells you you should be doing. It's been the best thing that happened, in a way – I know it sounds silly - but the earthquakes."

4.2 Coding

In addition to creating the sixteen vignettes above, I used thematic analysis to consider the content of the participants' experiences. The steps in this process involved two steps of coding – one before the construction of the vignettes and one afterward. I began the recursive process of reviewing all of the interviews individually, noting phrases, analogies, or anything that seemed central to their particular story or struck me as interesting or curious. From this mix, I created a mind-map of possible codes that included relevant extracts from the interviews. I then organized this rough content further into a matrix of initial codes (see Table 2).

Table 2: Initial Coding

Participants	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**
Acceptance (16)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Self-Responsibility (16)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Values Clarification (8)					x	x			x	x		x	x		x	x
Intentionality (8)					x	x	x	x	x	x			x			x
EQ as gift (3)						x		x		x						
Purpose (9)	x				x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x		
Pivot Point (5)					x	x				x			x			x
Transcendent (15)	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Nature (4)				x				x			x				x	
Community (11)	x				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x
Relationships (9)	x	x	x		x	x	x			x			x	x		
Lineage (10)	x	x						x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x

At this point in the analysis, I felt it was necessary to dive deeper into the individual interviews to integrate the content of their stories. To do this I wrote a narrative vignette for each of the sixteen participants that focused on capturing the main essence of their spiritual or meaningful experience within coping since the earthquakes. From this deeper connection, I reviewed the initial codes and distilled them further into main categories (see Table 3).

Table 3: Second Coding

Elements	Acceptance	Clarity & Choice	Community	Nature	Personal Relationships	Lineage	Transcendence
1 Spiritual Warrior	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2 The Sensitive	X	X			X	X	X
3 You Never Recover	X	X	X		X		
4 Nature is the Answer	X	X	X	X			X
5 Embodiment	X	X			X		X
6 Pinball Enlightenment	X	X	X		X		X
7 Kindness Mission	X	X	X		X		X
8 Higher Consciousness	X	X		X	X	X	X
9 The Call	X	X	X		X		X
10 No Fear	X	X	X		X	X	X
11 The Art of Spirituality	X	X	X	X			X
12 Going Away to Come Home	X	X	X				X
13 The Fish Eyeball Moment	X	X			X		X
14 Focus	X	X			X	X	X
15 Dogs and Community	X	X	X	X		X	X
16 Living Spiritual in a Material World	X	X	X		X	X	X

Upon review, I felt the categories of Community, Nature, Personal Relationships and Lineage shared an overall activity or theme of Connection. Therefore, the final analysis of the participants' personal spiritual or meaningful experiences resulted in four major elements of acceptance, clarity and choice, connection (the newly merged theme), and transcendence.

4.3 Elements

The earthquake sequence was a memorable experience for all of the participants. When asked to tell their story, they all started at the beginning with what they were doing when the earthquakes hit. All of them recounted the devastating effects of the earthquakes on the City of Christchurch which, as Stephen (9) put it, "didn't feel like a city anymore - it felt like a wasteland." Molly (1) felt this deeply as she mourned the loss of her city "the buildings that were there, being the same for me and for my parents…It's never going to be the same again." Elizabeth (7) shared that feeling of intense loss and spoke about her longing to be back in her old neighbourhood. "When we go back into town and drive down North ***** I'd love to turn left and go to **** Road."

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, some people were not as concerned with spiritual experiences as with physical ones. Many found their local lives immediately changed in a shocking and disorienting way. Paul (16) said, "On a day to day basis, not quite survival but living a real basic life – not being able to use the toilet, not having water and not being able to have a shower…it was a bit of a shock." Elizabeth (7) echoed this state of discomfort: "The next morning I was waking up, I said to my son 'I'm meant to go to the toilet' and he said, 'well, here's a shovel – go dig yourself a hole.' I'll never forget that, squatting on the lawn – 6 o'clock in the morning – this is what on earth is going on!"

The primary focus became making sure family and friends were safe and then tending to the physical home. Toni (6) saw this as a protection of sorts. "For the first couple of days we had no real understanding of how bad it was everywhere else. Actually, I was quite grateful for that as it allowed us to just cope with what we had to deal with, which was pretty significant. We didn't have to see the tragedy that was unfolding in town. People out here had a lot to deal with - just basic needs, you know, fulfilling and sustaining yourself was a pretty big deal."

The participants moved on from these beginning memories of the earthquakes in their accounts to content related to their spiritual and meaningful experiences and reflections which are highlighted in the narrative vignettes. After considering the nature of all of the experiences collectively, I have identified four common elements that suggest how spirituality or meaning may have played a role in coping. These elements are not distinct from each other, but often interweave together within the coping process and are outlined below.

4.3.1 Acceptance

Aftershocks and subsequent quakes continued for an eighteen-month period, which led most participants to a resigned state of acceptance. Anna (14) recognized the difficulty of this time but strongly asserted, "Acceptance is a large part" of spiritual coping. Most felt there was no choice but to accept earth's activity. "Mother Nature doing her thing" (Sam, 10); "It's nature" (Jane, 3); "I just see it as the earth moved" (Molly, 1); "There's no one to blame" (Maria, 5 & Vincent, 11); "We live in a world where there are natural disasters" (Stephen, 9); "you just learn to accept it and move on" (Marie, 12). Toni (6) commented on the way of being in this suspended ongoing state, "We were kind of just in it. I know that sounds a bit weird, um, we were literally just, we weren't thinking very far ahead because everything was still moving, we were still having massive shakes. And so you were just kind of doing your own thing."

This accepted state for many also became an exercise in living slowly and more appreciatively. For some there were distinct moments, such as Molly's (1) "God Moment" where she felt relieved that her family had survived but also blessed the morning after the first earthquake, "the dawning of the new day…warm and so very silent was like a benediction and a promise." Helen remembers that morning as more surreal, "It was most bizarre because all this terrible stuff had happened and yet it was the most glorious day."

Others felt as Vincent (11) did, that generally "life slowed down afterwards and it was really important." Amy (15) agreed saying that "the earthquakes forced us to go backwards and live a bit simply." Similarly, Marie (12) felt reinforced in what she always believed, "to live in the moment." Stephen (9), realized "that every day is a gift from God", and Elizabeth (7) focused on "celebrating the day – there's always something in every day that you're going to do that's nice." While Maria (5) summed this up by stating "that even chaos is there to teach

us something, you know, if we shift beyond the label of what's happening", which she likened to a quote hanging on her wall that says "Accept the present – there you will find the gift."

Two participants stood out in sharp contrast from the rest for their begrudging acknowledgement of the earthquakes. Both Jane (3) and Helen (4) stayed focused on fighting to keep their business and community going. Jane (3) conceded to me that "you think you've got over them, I don't think you ever do, I don't think you do". Her way of coping with that was to "bury" her anxiety and focus on her business and "just don't think about them." At one point she said, "If I get killed, I get killed… There's no point in dwelling on it…you just get on with our lives."

Helen did not accept the earthquakes so much as tolerate them, "I became quite inured to them." She clearly sees herself as a fighter and observed that the quakes "made me angry, very angry, I just wanted to hit them, smack them, punch them." She immersed herself in helping the community in various formal and informal ways and thrived on the adrenaline rush that battling the earthquakes gave her. However, she admitted that at one point this approach might have taken its toll on her. "It's funny though. I've felt tired this year and I did go to the doctor and everything is okay, but I wonder if it wasn't a mild depression." She - who looked to nature as a reviver of her soul - noted that during this time, "I didn't feel like going for walks."

4.3.2 Clarity and Choice

Whether accepting or fighting, most participants felt spurred on to assess their lives. This was often a process of clarifying values, finding meaning, living intentionally, and making choices accordingly in this post-quake reality. As Toni (6) said, "So if you can detach yourself from your own victimhood and tragedy and understand that, that offers you a sense of perspective. And from that sense of perspective you can actually then make choices." Anna (14) also stated, "Choice and responsibility is a part of living."

Moments of Clarity

Several of the participants recalled particular pivot point moments that signalled change. Paul (16), was explaining how his new alignment with spirituality developed by saying, "I still remember the moment I sort of got the belief back because it was a choice." Maria (5) talked about the sudden insight she had when her family crowded around her immediately

after she injured herself, which took her back to when she felt like a victim in her past. “I realized that this was happening again but… NO - I didn’t want it to be like that…I had to dive in and peel away all the layers.” When more family trauma ensued later on, she again had to make a decision. “Do I allow it to beat me? Do I get stuck on the story of what’s happened to me? Or can I find the strength to go inside and find what’s already there and find what’s in me that’s already untouched.”

Megan’s (13) call to action came from her experience of the slow-motion roll of a fish eyeball which led to a distinct and life changing “moment of clarity”. Similarly, Anna (14) had an immediate understanding of a new direction for her work after the first earthquake, which comforted her, “I knew I was in the right place at the right time for the right reasons.”

Alignment Process

In addition to these singular pivot points, others recounted an ongoing process of change or re-alignment. Both Paul (16) and Toni (6) used the word “enlightenment” in their narratives. Paul described a process of “osmosis” where he was learning more about spirituality that led to him having “a bit of a personal enlightenment”. He made a conscious choice to keep on with his spiritual development saying, “I did have to challenge myself around with spirituality… I had to sort of front up.”

Likewise, Toni (6) referred to everything that happened to her and the decisions she made after the earthquakes pointing to a “spiritual awakening and enlightenment” which set her upon a more creative pathway. Marie (12) also spoke about spiritual awakening in general for “people to really look inside themselves to realize that they are it, and it is up to us to nurture that inner life, rather than the exterior.” She felt she had always had this perspective but after the earthquake chaos, there was a “deepening” of this for her.

Maria (5) and Sam (10) used the analogy of a puzzle when talking about how their spirituality deepened and supported them. Maria had the experience of “all the pieces in the puzzle lining up to give me confirmation” which she saw as helpful guidance; while Sam said he came to understand the big picture of his life, saying, “it was a big jigsaw puzzle and now the puzzle’s made and it’s all easy to see.” Anna (14) felt the spiritual content of her psychic counselling practice become more concrete or “tangible” after the earthquakes. She used her hands to make a funnelling gesture, saying, “there was a cementation in my focus”, which seemed to offer a strong direction to her work.

Values Clarification

Many of the participants talked about changing their way of thinking and realizing what was important in their lives. For some this meant looking deeply within to uncover their personal value and wisdom. Maria (5) questioned, "Am I still a worthy person if I can live off the smell of an oily rag and live on nothing?" A sentiment shared by Marie (12) who also felt strongly that people tended to hide behind their possessions and status, and asked, "If you lose everything, who are you?" Toni (6) added another sobering question, "If you thought your life were ending tomorrow, what would you do with it?"

Stephen (9) talked about how his priorities came into clearer focus, "no one comes to the end of their life and wished they'd spent more time at the office or had another $10,000 in the bank or whatever it might be. What are the things that are really important?" While Megan (13) felt a distinct change in her priorities, "You kind of realize what's important … I don't feel like I need stuff anymore - it's not important."

Sam (10) saw the earthquakes as "a big push for finding yourself" and said, "the answers are always inside you, you have to trust yourself and just believe. And ask - the answer will always come." Maria (5) echoed that statement saying, "It's learning to trust that innate power within you to hold you no matter what is happening around you." Elizabeth (7) found strength and a sense of peace by reconnecting to her faith in God through daily prayer that also "taught me to be kind to myself." Vincent (11) saw this internal re-alignment and clarification after the earthquakes (or any difficulty) as equating spirituality to authenticity. He stated, "That's what spirituality does. It makes you one hundred percent yourself."

Purpose

With renewed clarity of their values, several participants felt more purposeful in their lives. Those with a more traditional spiritual understanding felt their sense of service reinforced. In the wake of the earthquakes, Stephen (9) understood why he was called to Christchurch and remembered thinking, "we really must be supposed to be here in this season to help people". It gave him a strong sense of intentionality, reinforcing that "every day is a gift from God."

Elizabeth (7) also felt she had a calling as she reflected on the roles she played in her family and new neighbourhood, "I just think God's given me this mission in life…You know maybe this is part of my life now, to be available to other people".

Molly (1) understood her intense prayerful state as being a “spiritual warrior” doing her part “as my beautiful city broke.” She explained, “When I started to hear of all the beautiful moments that were in Christchurch as the nightmare unfolded, I felt that my prayers were part of it.”

Spirituality for Sam (10) meant helping people. He and his father spent months using their construction background to check on the functionality of people’s houses in the neighbourhood, making sure front doors, toilet and bathroom doors worked. “Because the response team couldn’t get out to everybody and people had medications in bathrooms that they couldn’t get to or if there was a tremor, they wanted to get outside the front door.” As well, his new change in career focused on helping people live in more energy efficient, affordable housing.

Several of the participants offered their work with art and creativity as a way of outreach to the community. Molly (1) worked with school-aged children to help them process their earthquake experience through doing a large art project. She also co-created and performed in two theatrical productions about the earthquakes that prompted the mayor of her town to say, “he believed that what we were doing was helping the spiritual recovery of the people.”

Marie (12) is also an artist who offered creativity groups for children and one-on-one sessions for adults to work with art. She came to understand her work in a deeper sense, saying, “Just believing that art is a healing therapeutic activity and by doing it it helps people to get more in touch with their intuition and their own spiritual path. So if I can empower and encourage people to get back to that, then I feel I am in the right place.”

Others created earthquake related projects. Sarah (8) wrote a book, radio play and theatre play about the earthquakes, while Helen (4) coordinated a community art project that commemorated each of the houses lost in a “Red Zone” in her area. Finally, Vincent (11) created a symbolic and easily accessible memorial for people, meant to help them honour and grieve those who died in the February 22 earthquake.

4.3.3 Connection

Weaving through acceptance and self-responsibility was a strong sense of connection; to the community as a whole, to individuals, and nature.

Community

As Marie (12) was confronted with the challenges in her life after the earthquakes, she "felt an urgency to connect with the world beyond my insular little world." For her this "reaching out to the world" involved both returning momentarily to her roots in Scotland to rejuvenate her spirit and give her courage; and, then settling into interactive creative work in her local Christchurch community. She also found comfort in connecting with others who had experienced the earthquakes, "We weren't alone. We were all going through it."

Molly (1) and Jane (3) both realized how much a part of the community they were only once their respective businesses became non-functional. Reflecting on how her work situation changed, moving from a centrally located store to being in her home, Molly sighed, "We lost our place in the community. 'Cause you know when we moved back here, we're fairly isolated. It's not the same as going out to work." Jane noticed how important the social contact was from her work. "It was very social. I didn't realize until I had left that it was very social, you know like sometimes people would come into the shop three times a week. Often, they would just come in to see you. That was the whole thing." She also noted the importance of her business relationships at the time - never forgetting that the business insurance broker and the corporate office managers took the time to make contact with her soon after the earthquakes.

Almost all of the participants commented on how their communities pulled together to support each other and how important this was, even if it did tend to wane after a few years. For some, like Paul (16) this was a surprise as he found himself putting out a neighbourhood newsletter to keep everyone informed of new developments. "None of this had ever happened before ... we were just living in our little house". This need to connect has carried over into the new neighbourhood he now lives in. "We've been in this new place and we seem to be more aware of our neighbours and try to be in contact with them."

Amy (15) sees connection to neighbours as vital and one of the reasons she has since moved rural. "The farmers are great. The farmers are going 'what are you doing, what do you need, can we help?' They've still got that sense of connection going." She went on to say, "I know who the farmers are, I know their names, I know their wives, I know if they're okay, I know if the dog's gone missing. They check in on you, they stop when they go past you."

Elizabeth (7), who was forced to leave her red-zoned community, also knows the importance of connecting. “You’ve got to put yourself out to meet these people. I was seventy when I left (***** Road), I had plenty of friends and a big family - I wasn’t looking to make new friends or expecting to make new friends - but the earthquake has forced you to make new friends out here.”

Megan (13) echoed this need for spending time with friends, saying, “I get a lot more meaning about experiences, the people I am with, what we do, where we go. It feels like there is a bit more purpose and belonging to the whole community, or society as a whole really. You’re not just a cog in the machine going through life, you’re actually living, experiencing what‘s around you, the people around you.”

From a more formal perspective, Stephen (9) underlined the role that all of the churches played in supporting Christchurch by undertaking the several-years long task of checking on every household in the city. To him, that demonstrated a commitment to community that bypassed religious politics for the greater good of everyone in the city.

Personal Relationships

In addition to the community connection, some participants mentioned significant personal relationships. Several participants referenced their spouses repeatedly in their narratives such as Stephanie (2) who was clearly comforted by the connection to her “soul mate” husband who she also felt was “very strong” in his psychic ability. Jane (3) was grateful to the earthquakes for bringing her and her new partner, Rick, together, which was “funny” since they had worked in buildings next to each other for years but had never met.

Molly (1), Maria (5), Toni (6) and Marie (12) shared a protective concern for their own and others’ children after the earthquakes. Toni described this poignant connection to her child by saying, “When I walked out that door, I would always turn around and look at my son. I would look at him and tell him that I loved him and look consciously just in case I never saw him again. That’s a gift, that’s not a burden, that’s a gift.”

Nature

Several participants referenced their deep appreciation of nature and how significant it was in their lives. Vincent (11) suggested this in his example of how many New Zealanders chose

to celebrate the new millennium, “They were outside on the beach - they didn’t see the millennium in a church, they went to nature.”

For Helen (4) and Amy (15), nature was the balm that helped them cope. Helen said, “I learnt pretty early on in the piece that it didn’t matter how much the earth shook, every day you woke up and the sun was always strong, every forest still there, a lot of fences and road cones and stickers on buildings, but the sky and the earth and the trees were all there.” She continued, “I think nature is the answer...If I ever felt really ghastly, I would go outside - plant a tree or prune a hedge or something like that. Or even just go for a walk.”

Amy’s solace from nature also came from the landscape but more specifically, through animals. She said, “I think the ability to connect with nature was really important for me and the ability to connect with my animals...I got out into nature as much as possible. So when I needed a break, it would be take the dogs for a walk, go somewhere pretty, into nature a little bit more.” She admitted the stress of the earthquakes “made me keen to move rural”, which she did end up doing.

Sam (10) and Paul (17) experienced an awe for the raw power in nature. Sam described his fascination with some “really incredible things” he saw in “mother nature doing her thing.” He relayed an experience of the park across the street from his house. “There’s a big park - about four or six soccer fields - the whole park lifted about six feet in the air about a few minutes after the earthquakes. It was water pressure lifted all the soil and grass right up in the air and then it burst through - there were big geysers, massive torrents of water that just went flying down the road like a river...it wasn’t scary, it was more like ‘wow - I haven’t seen anything like this before!’”

Paul’s reaction was less fascinated awe and more a sense of vulnerability as he watched giant geysers coming up on the street outside his house. “That was really appalling in Christchurch - it was so much bigger than us.” It was at this point he reconsidered a notion of God or a higher power.

Sarah (8) expressed a need to connect with nature and valued the comfort of perspective it gave her. As she described her links to Canterbury and her appreciation for the South Island, we discussed the idea of nature being central to wellbeing. She said, “We can’t live without it. And when we do, we’re disordered, confused and chaotic, and um, when we let it get

small in our lives that's yeah, very distorting for people." She went on to talk about the resilience of people seeing their place in the big picture. "We only live about 70, 80, 90 years - that's our life span. You know the mountains have a much longer life span and some of our trees are five hundred years old - Kaitakere, Totara. And you know just to get ourselves in perspective really and to get just a bit of clarity about that you know (laughs). We think we're super important - we're just a part of it all".

4.3.4 Transcendence

All of the participants, save one, reported some form of transcendent experience. These ranged from a traditional connection to God, experiences of nature, supernatural occurrences, to descriptions of energy.

Jane (3) represented the exception by not making any reference to anything that she perceived as transcendent. She suggested that she never got over the earthquakes and dealt with that anxiety by burying it. As she tried to come up with a deeper explanation (perhaps to please me) she stopped herself. "Oh I just put it down to...no, look, I don't - it's nature. To put it philosophically like that, it's nature. Yeah. I'm not one to dwell on it."

Definitions of Spirituality

For all of the participants, I specifically avoided offering a definition of spirituality at the outset of this project in order to get at their own understanding of the concept. While some did offer definitions of spirituality, others who held non-traditional beliefs, felt compelled to explain their spiritual lineage (often after the digital recorder was shut off). This need to anchor their non-religious perspective with family illustrates the uneasiness that many people feel when talking openly about non-traditional spirituality. It is a sense of lack of cultural safety and therefore an attempt to demonstrate a type of legitimacy through family heritage.

Stephanie (2) recounted growing up under the influence of a non-traditionally spiritual mother and others in her family lineage. She said, "My mother was spiritual so I was brought up with that sort of spiritual thing of being just aware...Like children are brought up, they grow up; they're very spiritual when they're young. They see people, they tell their parents (who respond) 'oh you're imagining things' - that's the stopper. If I said anything like that to my mother, to her that would be normal. She would ask questions about it." She gave me an example. "We were over in Australia - we had gone over to live there for six months. In

the middle of the night, I woke up and there was a figure at the end of my bed. I found out later it was my Granddad. I told Mom the next day and she said, 'that's all right'. It was just normal. So you don't think anything of it." She went on to explain the lineage further back. "Because my mom, she used to be able to talk to her father. Then one time I was talking to a local psychic and my Granddad came through and the psychic was laughing, saying 'his mother used to read the cards. Two hundred years ago that was a bit of a no-no, they had to keep it quiet.' To me, so it comes through her father, the Scottish side."

Sam (10) also referenced his family history relating to his own spiritual perspective, which he saw as "being internally strong". He told me that his grandfather was a "Diviner - he used the rods to find water." As a boy, Sam thought there was something more going on there but his grandfather was in a prominent public position and so did not talk openly about divining or other spiritual things that had occurred in the family.

The person from Sarah's (8) lineage bringing through spirituality was her father. "A profound gift from my father, from his whole clan, yeah. In Ireland, the *****, they're from Donegal and they are called "the holy people" there. In Donegal, the O'Donnell are the kings and queens but the ***** were the holy people of Donegal. So that gift comes through."

Anna did offer a spiritual definition but also tied it to her upbringing. She said "spiritual is simply all - there's no division. I regarded any separation of spiritual from 'normal' life as an illusion and it is buying into Sundayism. I was brought up in a secular society, which, although it had rituals, they were well and truly voluntary, and it was the smaller part of the population who adhered to them. Added to that my mother was brought up as a theosophist, The Theosophical Society. In fact, my great-grandmother and great-grandfather were the first to join - that's how far back it goes. So, the idea of institutionalized religion wasn't in her upbringing and as a result she certainly didn't put it into ours."

While Amy (15) shyly told me about sharing her Dad's ability for "sensing" things, she was stronger in her language about spirituality. She said "I'd like to see that human spirituality again. No matter what religion you are, there's always something about that, about the connection with other people, a positive emphasis on hospitality and helping others, and being a bit more modest." She went on to emphasize a definition of spirituality should include "connection with people, connection with nature, and a sense of togetherness or sense of belonging."

Maria (5), Toni (6) and Paul (16) all used the word energy to refer to spirituality. Maria sees a spiritual practice as developing "your connection to Source, which by its very nature is beauty, love, all-encompassing happiness, bliss and all that...It's based on a connection...take your breath there and you'll open into the energy." While Toni said, "For me spirituality is not about a God directing things. I see it as a Universal Energy that we can all tap in to." Paul added, "I'm still not sure what to call that thing. God - I still use the word but it has connotations to the past. I tend to think of higher energy or a cosmic something."

Both Stephen (9) and Megan (13) offered definitions. Stephen, the only minister in the study, suggested that spirituality should include "a sense that people believe that they were created for a purpose and that there's more to life than just themselves. A sense that they kind of want to make the world a better place...It seems that life is more than just about yourself." Megan viewed it a bit differently, saying, "I think it's to do with the whole, your spirit, and what you feel, what you think - the positives. I see spirituality as a positive thing, having a positive way of living and seeing the world and making yourself feel good, basically."

Vincent (11) offered more of an observation than a definition of spirituality. He said, "I think there's a mystery about spirituality. We are more than what we think ...there is an otherness about us." He went on to say, "If you ask New Zealander's where do they feel closer to God - whatever God may mean - they will say the mountains, the river, the bush, in the trees and the forest. I've asked this question. The mystery of it."

Helen (4) certainly related to this sense of meaningfulness in nature. "I think I'm not a spiritual person, but to me I would find a forest far more spiritual than a church. I'd only be in a church to look at the art but certainly in a forest - ahhh - all the splendour of nature, I just think it's wonderful and it's very healing, very healing."

Supernatural

Half of the participants experienced some aspect of the supernatural, which Craffert, Baker, and Winkelman (2019) defines as "extraordinary events or experiences, inexplicable phenomena and even common human experiences that appear to violate the known laws of physics or accepted scientific beliefs" (Craffert et al., 2019, p. 1).

Only one participant, Megan (13), was uncomfortable with her otherworldly experience. During the first earthquake that occurred in the middle of the night, she heard her name being called two separate times. When it turned out not to be her roommate calling out to her, Megan was decidedly uncomfortable. “So that was kind of weird. So, I guess it’s just me hearing things, just ignore it. I’ve not been brought up in a religious environment. My mother isn’t anti-religion, but she doesn’t want to be involved in that sort of thing.” Upon further reflection she mused to me, “It was a year or two after my grandmother died so there’s that whole, probably don’t want to think about things too much because it’s out of my comfort zone and it’s not what I’m used to thinking about or talking about. That would mean admitting that there is an afterlife and maybe ghosts, stuff with spirit world and that is completely alien to my way of life.”

Stephanie (2) on the other hand, welcomed the sense of presence from another realm. She felt that her husband was stronger in being able to see and sense spirits but thinks that her own ability has grown stronger since the earthquakes. She told me of Harold, her husband, psychically putting “four Sentinels – one on each corner of the caravan – on our site. And ever since then, I see them patrolling out of the corner of my eye.” Far from being scary, Stephanie felt protected and comforted by this.

Two participants experienced being in an altered state. Molly (1) went into an intense prayerful state where she was howling and crying, “pleading for God’s mercy. It is as if I am fighting a spiritual battle and I even wave my arms as though I am holding a really large sword. It doesn’t last for long...and I can’t continue to pray like that when it lifts...but it feels, looking back, as though I had in some way been of use to God...in a situation that was beyond anything I could do.” This did not frighten Molly as she had been in this state twice before in her life. Instead, she was grateful, sensing that she had been helpful in some way.

Sarah (8) fell into a six-week state of heightened awareness as she experienced the pain of losing several close members of her family, including her son and mother, while also dealing with the shocks of the earthquakes. She described coming close to this state when she consciously meditated in the past, but this was a different level of intensity, “it just enveloped my everything, my awareness” and she could “see all sorts of things” such as members of her family who had died. She interpreted this in a positive light saying, “Yeah I think it was a grace filled state. It was probably the only way I could have survived physically

and emotionally. Because...Because, otherwise I don't know how other people survive that - I don't 'know how I would have been able to get through it. I wouldn't still be alive now."

Similarly, Paul (15) was exposed to an intense state through a spiritual healing session he received at the meditation center. The spiritual healing is meant to balance the body, mind, and spirit, by working with life-force energy similar to the Chinese medicine concept of Chi. Initially he was sceptical "aw, superstition you know. Um. But I gave it a go and I listened to what they were saying about energy here and actually, it really rang true." He struggled to find the words to explain the vividness he felt after the healing session; how he moved from a material to a deeper consciousness. He used the analogy of living as though colour blind beforehand. He said, "I tried the healing and I'm basically colour blind - not really – I can see colours – but I think I live in black and white or something. I'm not quite sure, you know. But then after this healing, you have to wait for a while, but when I was driving home ... the trees … it's something in my brain, you know. But yeah, wow, something is here." He saw his reaction to the healing sessions as fitting with his own meditative experiences of peaceful walking along the beach, and the formal meditation he went on to learn from the Center. All of these things combined in his mind to create "a belief in something bigger than myself."

Several of the other participants experienced new activity in their regular meditation practices. Maria (5) met a new grouping of Spirit Guides (disembodied beings that act as benevolent guides) in meditation one day and was introduced to the concept of "Light Language" (an esoteric, universal language based on tonal sounds) which she embraced for her own spiritual growth and healing. She went on to use it with clients in her alternative therapy practice.

Similarly, Anna (14) also described a new spiritual guide that came to her in meditation. She immediately knew "He's a serious guy - this is heavy duty stuff he is. He is an answer to a question that I've put. This is serious, we are together in this." She felt relief to have this assistance and was confident that this guide would "become more pointed and stabilizing, because he has been through many, many traumatic situations and it's about the focus."

Finally, Sam (10) referred to the fact that his "raised consciousness" was bringing him into contact with other like-minded people who were also working to create positive change. He also explained that he often received "downloads" of information that helped in developing some of the newer technical projects in his company.

Energy

A few of the participants talked about energy - both individually and in the community of Christchurch. Maria (5) talked about energy as both an embodiment of fear and of empowerment. She came to realize she stored the stress of the earthquakes and unresolved grief over her father's death in her body as fear. As one who works with alternative therapies, she sees the body as a "feedback system...We have to learn to understand what is happening to our bodies - what is our body trying to tell us?" From her own injury experience, she learned the triggers that caused her body to go right back into "fight/flight" mode and how to overcome that. "What happens with fear is mind-based. Fear has a purpose to keep us safe, but then it becomes conditioned. And then every time we heard a vibration or a shake, that's when the mind would then associate that as another threat...I've learnt to see what it is - just old programming, it's old trauma. I simply go into my breath and give myself permission to release that, not to keep holding it in my body." She teaches this concept of breath and accessing the energy within to her clients. "I'm teaching people 'connect to your breath. Breathe in receiving and filling up. Start to notice what's in your body; know that you've got an access to energy that can help you move what's being held in your body."

Marie (12) spoke about the energy within herself and the city after the earthquakes. Looking back over the last six or seven years, she commented "so much has happened since then in people's lives and the city and I think we all probably don't realize how much we've grown through that experience in a positive way." She expanded this by saying, "We're more empathetic, more courageous and we know how to recover from a trauma that's not been about one person, it's about a whole community - a city, not even a town." Marie remembered the loss and still struggled with aspects of it. "The whole losing a city, from the energy not the buildings so much, I mean that's one thing, but it was the life and the energy and the lack of international connection for me. Losing that was massive and I still miss that because it's not properly back."

Toni (6) also experienced a change in the energy of Christchurch but in a slightly different way – as a transfer of sorts. "It's as if the energy that was exerted from the earthquake, we needed to absorb that spiritually, if you like. People who have been through it energetically are more compassionate, are more tolerant, um are more adaptable. The term resilience gets bandied around and we all hate the term - fag resilience we're not interested in it. I

think that the energy from the quake or quakes, the ongoing energy, it was as if Mother Earth was transferring her energy to us so that we could use it."

Sarah (8) agreed that Christchurch had changed and noted "a profound shift in consciousness. And it's not just me, it's the whole city and the island really." She went on to talk about a rise in Feminine energy, equating that to Mother Earth. "She's dancing around here wildly, having a lovely time! She's just doing her thing and we've got to learn to speak the Feminine into the world. And it's in people's hearts and minds to shift so profoundly and they won't even know that it's happened to them. Though some of us are conscious of the shift." She also recognized in retrospect, how much growth had happened over the years. "We've done a lot of growing throughout this, the people of this place, this island really. Yeah, opened their hearts and their minds."

She went on to tell a story that for her clearly embodied the shift in the city. "I was walking down the road one day and I saw this little old lady and she had on her jewels and stuff and she looked like a Merivale lady (someone from a fairly affluent Christchurch neighbourhood). And there's this guy walking down the road, and he had dreads - this big, huge Maori guy. And she looked up at him and she smiled at him and he smiled at her, and I knew that that had changed for her. She knew that if there was a big earthquake, the person who was going to lift her up and carry her in his arms was that big dude. That she might have thought 'oh, you're going to beat me up', she knew now that he was going to carry her."

4.4 Summary

This chapter firstly outlined the sixteen narratives of the research participants in shortened vignettes based on the transcripts of their interviews. Each narrative vignette presented the main essence of the spiritual or meaningful experience and was highlighted by the title caption.

All sixteen stories were then further analyzed as a group for common themes around the nature of the participants' spiritual or meaningful experiences and how these were associated with their coping during and after the earthquakes. From this analysis, four main themes or elements emerged which looked at the concepts of: 1) Acceptance, 2) Clarity and Choice, 3) Connection, and, 4) Transcendence.

The question now is how are these themes related to spirituality and its role in coping with an ongoing, chaotic situation such as the Christchurch Earthquake Sequence? The following Discussion Chapter will address this by using the analogy of a braided river, a natural phenomenon found in New Zealand.

Chapter 5

Discussion

"I get up. I walk. I fall down. Meanwhile I keep dancing."

Daniel J. Hillel

The sixteen vignettes in the previous chapter presented people's varied ways of experiencing spirituality, both explicitly and implicitly, while coping with the earthquakes. Since many in contemporary society view spirituality as separate from religion, it has been helpful to explore this concept in its own right, with sensitivity to language and including many perspectives. The purpose of this research, therefore, was to examine the possible role of spirituality, in this broadest sense, within coping during and after the 2010/11 Canterbury Earthquake Sequence in New Zealand. This study explored this phenomenon by considering the following two questions:

1. What was the nature of any personal spiritual or meaningful experiences people may have had during or since the earthquakes beginning on September 4, 2010; and,

2. How were these experiences associated with coping and recovery?

The results of the thematic analysis suggest a spirituality that is largely mundane in nature, encompassing common activities that involve central elements of acceptance, clarity and choice, connection, and transcendence. While some may not consider transcendence mundane, it becomes more common when viewed as a way of momentarily stepping outside our regular, everyday perspective.

These everyday interactions taken together offered the participants a paradoxical way of both surrendering to the stressful situation caused by the earthquakes while also transcending it. I contend that the process of using these elements comprises a type of *transcendent coping* that can occur regardless of religious or spiritual orientation; may be common to many people but not explicitly identified as spiritual; and, serves to enhance other types of coping.

In this discussion, I will revisit the difficulties involved in speaking of spirituality or transcendence outside of a religious context. In the following section, I will analyse the four common elements of acceptance, clarity and choice, connection and transcendence in light of other models of secular spirituality and consider the function of these elements in coping after the earthquakes. This is followed by a conceptualization of transcendent coping within the existing transactional model of coping, which draws on theories within positive psychology and uses the metaphor of a braided river – a unique geological occurrence particularly appropriate to Canterbury, New Zealand. Implications and limitations of this research, as well as suggestions for future research, will end the chapter.

5.1 On Spirituality, Language, and Lineage

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, defining spirituality is difficult when it is a concept that is so personal and yet intrinsic to human nature. In this regard, Swinton and Pattison (2010) suggested that vagueness is actually good when approaching the subject of spirituality. They argue that instead of focusing on the words as definition, there is more utility in considering "the function of those words in practice ... and the people and contexts in which they are used" (Swinton & Pattison, 2010, p. 227). With no formal definition supplied to the participants in this study, it was left open to their own individual interpretation as to what was spiritual or meaningful to them.

These intricacies of language challenged many of the participants during their interviews. Several of them struggled to find the right words when talking about their personal spiritual experiences. This ranged from the practicing minister who appeared careful not to overuse religious terminology, to another participant with distinct anti-religion sentiment who laboured to find the appropriate replacement name for God, eventually settling on "Cosmic Something". Others spoke haltingly, almost shyly about some spiritual aspects of their experiences, often waiting until the end of the interview to bring them up.

As within academia, I suspect this discomfort relates to a common perception of spirituality being outside the norm, especially in a country as secular as New Zealand. Without the license of religion, it is often uncomfortable to speak candidly about spiritual experiences and concepts. As a researcher with over thirty years of personal research, reading, and practice in spirituality, I found a reluctance even in myself to include participants from

overtly alternative spiritual backgrounds. I had to confront myself on this bias when I realized it felt more "legitimate" to talk with those with a traditional religious background.

It should not have surprised me, then, that several participants, who ascribed to spiritual beliefs outside traditional religion, felt compelled to tell me about the roots of their spirituality – usually stemming from their childhood. It was as if they wanted to demonstrate that they came by their spiritual views and beliefs legitimately by being influenced by their families, just as many grow up with inherited religious faiths and traditions. This relates somewhat to the discussion of community and connection in the following section.

Despite these challenges with language when dealing with ineffable occurrences, compounded by some discomfort around talking about spiritual matters, the participants offered their stories. Their narratives suggest common elements of a type of spiritual or transcendent coping – be that explicit or implied - that was used post-earthquakes.

5.2 The Nature and Function of Spiritual/Meaningful Experiences

To review, the narrative vignettes in the previous chapter described a range of spiritual and meaningful experiences connected to the earthquakes. Molly (1) and Sarah (8) spoke of entering into an altered, deep state of being, while Toni (6), Sam (10), Megan (13), and Paul (16) developed a new direction for their life paths. Stephanie (2), Maria (5), and Anna (14), as well as Megan (13) reported supernatural incidences, although this was not the most meaningful content of Megan's account. Both Helen (4) and Amy (15) embraced different aspects of nature, while Jane (3) focused on relationships. Finally, Stephen (9), Vincent (11) and Marie (12) related ongoing connection to their existing religious or spiritual perspectives, and, Elizabeth (7) re-engaged with prayer and mindfulness.

The cross-narrative analysis of these experiences revealed common elements of acceptance, clarity and choice, connection, and transcendence that are similar to content found in some recent non-theistic focused research on spirituality.

Reflecting on spirituality's connections to science, Worthington Jr (2012) outlined three sources of secular spirituality, in addition to a theistic approach, that echo the elements of connection and transcendence found in my participants' accounts. One was nature spirituality, which is experiencing closeness with nature through interacting with different aspects of nature and animals; human spirituality, which is experiencing humanity by

creating connections with people; and, cosmos or transcendent spirituality, which is experiencing a sense of connection with all of creation. (Worthington & Aten, 2009; Worthington Jr, 2012).

Within a case study approach, Gatmon (2015) looked at secular spiritual experiences consisting of four ways of knowing that involved expansiveness, guidance, action, and faith. Expansive knowing was connected to feeling elated, inspired, joyful and so on. Guided knowing was based on listening to one's inner voice or intuition, which then primed a third way of knowing action that is acting from a sense of deep conviction and purpose. Finally, faith-filled knowing occurred from experiencing the other three ways of knowing, resulting in a "sense of wholeness, connection and clarity regarding the nature of the universe and one's part in it" (Gatmon, 2015, p. 14).

These ways of knowing were not seen as mysterious encounters, but rather parts of everyday life that people could learn to notice and cultivate. Gatmon's guidance and action ways of knowing relate to the elements of clarity and choice, in that inner certainty becomes conscious and then guides a person's actions. Similarly, the faith-filled knowing corresponds to transcendence, in the positive sense of expansiveness that results. While Gatmon's research occurred within a program focused on spiritual development, it is interesting to see the overlap with the participants' experiences in this post-earthquake, daily living setting.

In their work on defining spirituality versus religion, Gall et al., (2011) outlined seven universal themes that emerged from a qualitative survey of 234 participants from over ten countries. The themes for spirituality included:

- the essential, inner core of the self
- providing a framework or guide for how to live according to one's beliefs and values
- a relationship between the self and god or a higher power
- mystical and accepting that it cannot be easily explained
- providing a connection between all living things
- part of religion
- meaningless and unfounded for some (Gall et al., 2011, pp. 176-177).

The recruitment in the Gall et al. (2011) study relied partly on religious channels such as parishes, religious associations, and a Catholic diocese, which may have contributed to a strong religious tone in the results. However, two open-ended questions did mitigate this

effect by specifically asking about each participant's experience of spirituality (as separate from religion), and how spirituality (as they defined it) may have helped or hindered coping with a stressful event. The findings indicated that spirituality supported coping, provided meaning and emotional support, created positivity, and enhanced the self by increasing inner strength and self-esteem (Gall et al., 2011, p. 174).

The components within all of these models and the findings in this research, like the definitions mentioned earlier, suggest spirituality is personal and significant in many people's lives. Each person develops their own understanding of what spirituality is and how it may function in their life and may modify and evolve the concept over their lifetime. The scope of this research is not focused on creating a final definition of spirituality, but rather understanding how spirituality appeared and functioned in the participants' accounts of their experiences during and after the earthquakes. I now turn to the four elements that emerged from the narratives and explore their association with the participants' coping and recovery.

5.2.1 Acceptance

After the initial shock and then the repeat cycle of five major earthquakes and tens of thousands of aftershocks, the participants indicated there was no option but to accept the situation. For some, this acceptance was resigned and reluctant, with an edge of hostility or fatalism. For most of the others, it was a neutral, sensible approach - accepting the unpredictable and uncomfortable state allowed energy for just dealing with the situation. It was the "we were just in it" description offered by one of the participants. In a similar but more extreme example, psychologist Eger described the same sense when she found herself living in the incomprehensible situation of a Nazi concentration camp. She said, "The option to fight or flee didn't exist...So I learned to flow, I learned to stay in the situation"(Eger, 2017, p. 295). Similarly, narrative research with women in Christchurch after the earthquakes revealed their coping as accepting their vulnerability and risk in the situation, while also contributing to community recovery (McManus, 2015). In this way, the women "found social innovation as a source of solace, and solace as a source of resilience"(McManus, 2015, p. 37).

In his research on the state of flow, Csikszentmihalyi (2008) describes how it is possible to convert a chaotic situation into something manageable or even positive by accepting it. To

conquer a difficult situation requires changing focus from the personal discomfort to a heightened awareness of the challenging environment (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). By paying attention to and accepting the dynamics of the earthquake condition, the participants were in effect, gaining unity with the new circumstance in order to best cope with it. As Csikszentmihalyi (2008) states, "achieving this unity with one's surroundings is not only an important component of enjoyable flow experiences but is also a central mechanism by which adversity is conquered" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 205).

Grieving

Part of acceptance was experiencing the array of emotions that arose. This was a process of acknowledging and engaging with the pain, the trauma for some, and even moments of joy. Instead of stoically ignoring the uncomfortable emotions, most of the participants allowed themselves to face the feelings that ensued, such as grief and fear. Just as there was nothing to immediately do to solve the physical aftermath of the earthquakes, there was a need to allow the emotional upheaval to play out.

Several of the participants confronted the deep grief at the loss of their city, neighbourhood and homes. Interestingly, one participant felt her grieving process was initially arrested by not being allowed into the city to view the extent of the damage. From her Catholic background, she likened this to not being able to see the body at Prayers, a ritual held the evening before a funeral where people can come to visit the deceased to say good-bye and offer their blessings. For her, a level of acceptance deepened only after she was able to visit the city of Christchurch years on, coming to see it as a new city, unlike the one of her youth.

A few of the participants described the grief of the earthquakes triggering feelings around other past losses. They wilfully experienced this consolidated grief, and by embracing the emotions, were able to recover. These wave-like responses to grief typify the oscillation process identified in resilient grieving theories such as the Dual Process Model put forward by Stroebe and Schut (2010). They purport that coping with loss involves a non-linear movement between facing grief and then moving out of it by focusing on the new life circumstance after loss (Stroebe & Schut, 2010). Research has shown this shuttling back and forth between a "loss-oriented" and a "restoration-oriented" process continues until eventually the coping process diminishes (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 283). The oscillation process allowed the participants in this study to benefit from both accepting and

experiencing their emotions, while also taking a break from them, as they coped with post-earthquake life.

Presence

Many of the participants suggested another aspect of accepting post-earthquake life involved slowing down and living more in the present moment. Not fighting emotions, and at the same time, appreciating and engaging in daily life, offered a relief of sorts. Instead of looking back to what was, or forward to all the possible complications and issues for the future, a renewed focus on the present allowed them just to 'be'. Tolle (2004) refers to this approach of experiencing life in each individual moment as "making space", and differentiates between a life situation (in this case, post-earthquake) and a life (the present moment) (Tolle, 2004, p. 63). By bringing awareness to the present moment in time, a person is using a kind of mindfulness to cease being in conflict with their experience, thus accepting it (Chambers & Hassed, 2015).

While this could be interpreted as a fleeting act of emotional taming, the ability for the participants to make a truce with the earthquake disruption appeared to empower them. This is akin to the 'Broaden and Build' Theory of Positive Emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) which suggests that experiencing positive emotions such as peacefulness which may ensue from acceptance, contributes to an overall feeling of wellbeing which in this case, strengthened the participants in their coping.

The element of acceptance, therefore, provided a starting point for recovery. By not using energy to fight the post-earthquake situation, this surrender to a new reality allowed for just being in the experience. Instead of immediately looking for solutions or meaning, the activity of acceptance provided an opening to the unfolding of the new reality. This element was an immersion into the entire experience, letting the emotions, challenges, and new understanding and choices, arise. This slowed down state of acceptance encouraged a renewed clarity over the participants' thoughts, values, and emotions, preparing them to make new decisions and appropriate choices for their lives.

5.2.2 Clarity and Choice

Alongside the acceptance of their experiences, many participants found themselves assessing their lives. This was a process of clarifying their beliefs and values that often led to them making new choices in their lives, be it how they think, work or relate to the world.

New Alignment

In several instances, participants described experiencing a flash of insight or deep knowing that occurred in a distinct moment, or in other cases, as part of an enlightenment or alignment process. Wong (2016) explains such insights from the perspective of existential positive psychology as a way of redefining the self to live more authentically. He states, "The process of authentication often begins with a moment of awakening, a deepening of conviction about core values, and a felt sense of one's true identity" (Wong, 2016, p. 2). Once a person connects with what feels like their true nature, it then becomes their responsibility to live and act in alignment with that self-knowledge (Wong, 2011).

Similarly, Lancaster and Palframan (2009) consider self-transformation in their work on spirituality and coping with major life events, seeing it as a process of letting go of the old way of viewing the world before the stressful event, to embrace a new and deeper understanding of the self (Lancaster & Palframan, 2009, p. 271). This openness to a new, more aligned way of being overlaps with the element of acceptance. It involved accepting the new interpretation of the self, which had been forged from experiencing the emotions, and practicing being present to all that had occurred during and since the earthquakes. The new alignment moved the participants into actively clarifying what they now believed to be true for themselves.

Values and Beliefs

While not all participants underwent significant pivot point changes in their lives, most came to feel a clearer understanding of their values and beliefs. Values such as play, kindness, presence (as mentioned earlier), relationships, and community moved to the fore. A re-valuing of people and experiences above aspects of the world like the latest technology or fashion or wealth accumulation, offered significant refocusing. This aligns with research carried out by Lambert et al. (2013), who found that reduced materialism was a feature in autobiographical narratives on spiritual versus enjoyable experiences.

At the same time, several participants felt a deepened valuing of what they perceived as their spiritual connection. Some spent more time and energy connecting with their inner life or deep intuition, places of significance, creativity, and prayer/meditation. There seemed a sense of urgency for many; as if the strength that arose from aligning to their values and beliefs provided a fundamental core base from which to operate, with no time to waste on

living according to values that no longer fitted. This created less tolerance for people and situations understood as 'negative' and offered a strong sense of intentionality and purpose.

Meaning

The process of assessing values and beliefs led many of the participants to create new meaning from the challenges they faced since the earthquakes. Park and Folkman (1997) expanded the original transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to include meaning-focused coping, which has clear relevance here. To review, the two original forms of coping in the model were emotion-focused coping, which is an approach to regulating distress, and problem-focused coping, which seeks to manage the problems causing the distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In times when both of these approaches to coping are not completely effective in managing stress - such as being in a prolonged, unpredictable stressful situation such as the earthquake sequence - finding meaning in the situation becomes another mode of coping. This meaning-finding can be seen as a spiritual action in itself, whether the meaning is attributed to God or 'energy' or a secular notion of the wider benefit to community, as a few of the participants indicated.

Viktor Frankl is perhaps the most famous advocate of meaning-focused coping with his writing on his experiences of being a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. As mentioned previously, he developed the concept of tragic optimism – a radical path of finding hope in meaning by "saying yes to life in spite of everything" (Frankl, 1946/1985, p. 161), even amidst the most deplorable circumstances. Lomas and Ivtzan (2016, p. 1755) acknowledge this "dialectic" between positive and negative as "tension or opposition between two interacting forces or elements" and suggest that both elements are necessary for wellbeing. In the case of the earthquakes, the loss and destruction of the city would be viewed as also contributing to the sense of meaning and connection that sprang up for people as they worked together to rebuild their community. Similarly, several of the participants spoke of rising above feeling like victims in the wake of the earthquakes to embrace a new, more empowered perspective for their lives.

Empowered Action

When examined through the theoretical lenses of Stress Mindset, Hardiness, and Self-Determination, spirituality contributed to the agency of the participants. They were able to harness their spiritual or meaningful experiences to confront the stress presented by the

earthquakes. Several of the participants expressed a wry gratitude for the earthquakes, seeing them as a catalyst for fresh insight, new growth and positive redirection in their lives.

In a slightly different vein, Maddi (2004) and Wong (2017) understand the process of finding new options amidst stress as a type of existential courage. Instead of trying to maintain or return to the status quo, those who allowed the stress to open them to different pathways were using what Maddi describes as "hardiness" – a construct involving commitment, control, and challenge (Kobasa, 1979; Maddi, 2004). Rather than collapsing into despair over the challenging situation of the earthquake sequence, the participants committed to overcoming the difficulty by using aspects of spirituality. Acceptance of the situation created a slowing down to refocus and re-evaluate, which appears as a type of surrender. However, the paradox in this surrender was that it functioned also as a strengthening – providing commitment and ability to act in new, meaningful ways to overcome the challenging situation.

Similarly, in their review of vitality and energy, Ryan and Deci (2008) suggest that vitality is enhanced when people pursue courses of action based on intrinsic goals. Aligning with that which held meaning for them created a personal empowerment for the participants, thus fulfilling the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness outlined in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008). That is, by honouring their values and beliefs, they made decisions and took action that felt correctly aligned with their own meaning and purpose that often involved making significant connections to others.

5.2.3 Connection

Perhaps the most pervasive element in all of the participants' experiences is that of connection. From community, to personal and business relationships, to pets, nature, and for some, God, all of the narratives recounted significant connections that brought them comfort. This drive for affiliation during stress has been described as the need to "tend and befriend" by Taylor (2011), whose research has demonstrated that human nature compels people to "come together for mutual protection and solace and to protect offspring"(Taylor, 2011, pp. 86, 96). In his work on healing trauma, Van der Kolk (2015) underscores the fact that people need a sense of safety to recover from disasters, which he states " involves reconnecting with our fellow human beings"(Van der Kolk, 2015, p. 212). He also points out

that the best support comes from those who understand or have experienced the traumatic situation such as, in this case, fellow earthquake survivors.

Community

Most of the participants spoke of the community coming together to watch over each other and help out in whatever ways they could, especially during the immediate aftermath of the major earthquakes. This engendered a feeling of togetherness that took many by surprise, but all appreciated, and rued its loss as it dissipated over the years afterward. One of the participants demonstrated this best as she recalled the profound relief she felt from connecting with others, saying "we weren't alone. We were all going through it... we had cups of tea that brought the community together". Research on a community devastated after Hurricane Ike in 2008 (Richardson & Maninger, 2016) echoed this stabilizing effect of a shared sense of recovery after their disaster experience. The study explored communal coping demonstrated in themes reflecting the mutuality of the disaster, the coming together to solve the resulting problems, and the development of a shared community narrative about the disaster recovery (Richardson & Maninger, 2016).

The positive feelings of support and cohesiveness created by being part of a group of people experiencing and overcoming this historic community event could be interpreted as a form of social flow (Walker, 2010). In his study, Walker analysed people's descriptions of solo and social flow experiences, and conducted two experiments on interdependent team play, to arrive at indicators of social flow. A list emerged that involved features such as shared attention, loss of sense of time and self, shared positive emotion, and, feeling a sense of purpose (p.9). While it might seem unusual to find positivity in a post-disaster scenario, most of the participants in my study enjoyed the cohesive spirit that developed in their community after the earthquakes. Fritz (1996) notes the common bonds that are evoked after disaster, saying, "the reference changes from "only I have suffered" to "all of us have suffered; we are all in it together" (Fritz, 1996, p. 58).

Some research has shown community to represent a type of spirituality. A study of the Canadian Mi'kmaq society indicated that being part of this specific group and honouring that heritage by "caring for each other in everyday life" was a form of spirituality (Hornborg, 2011, p. 265). As one of the participants in my study said, "It was all coming back to people –

the most important thing." His comment was a reflection that surprised him somewhat in that his regard for people close to him now extended outward to everyone.

Similarly, research on survivors of the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008 revealed that their spirituality resided in family and community relationships, as well as honouring ancestors (Ren, 2012). This links to the way many of the participants in my study wanted to draw attention to their family heritage of non-traditional spirituality. The warm tone of voice, accompanied by smiles and laughter as they fondly remembered their relatives and their particular spiritual beliefs and actions, belied any sense of inadequacy or strangeness that traditional society might hold. Rather, it was clear that the participants were proud and comforted by the connection they felt with their loved ones' spiritual ways.

Contribution

A strong sense of connection to the community combined with the sense of purpose described in the previous element, resulted in many participants contributing to their community. A surprising number of participants used their creativity to give back and reach out to others, especially children, which fits the motivation for meaningful work that Cameron et al. (2018) found in their research on creativity in the wake of disaster.

Working in schools with the children, creating memorials, writing, and performing about the earthquakes were ways six of the participants in my study sought to use art in a meaningful way. Marie (12) emphasized the importance of art to spirituality, coping, and her contribution, by saying, "art is a healing therapeutic activity and by doing it, it helps people to get more in touch with their intuition and their own spiritual path. So if I can empower and encourage people to get back to that …then I feel I am in the right place." Moore (2015) underlined the spirituality of art, both in the making and the beholding, as allowing one to "play, express, represent, honour, heal, teach, sanctify, encode, and explore ideas" (Moore, 2015, p. 160).

For others, contribution meant service of various forms such as religious ministry, voluntarily carrying out neighbourhood post-earthquake repairs, offering kindness and friendship, and providing spiritual guidance. One participant, in fact, defined his personal spirituality as being strong in order to help people. This need to help was echoed In the wider Christchurch community, where social flow and contribution could be seen within grassroots mobilizations such as the Student Volunteer Army (SVA) and the Rangiora Earthquake

Express (REE)(Du Plessis et al., 2015). Both organizations grew from a single person amassing resources to help, such as one young man coordinating an 'army' of students to assist with cleaning up the liquefaction throughout the city. Similarly, the REE was initiated by one woman who reached out to others to send supplies by helicopter into neighbourhoods in Christchurch that were cut off.

People, Pets, and Nature

In many of the narratives, relationships figured prominently and the first instinct of most of the participants during the earthquakes was to establish the safety of their loved ones. Participants clearly valued their spouses and children, and in one instance, business partnerships. Van der Kolk (2014) emphasized that these attachments are the most important when dealing with trauma as they allow people to relax into the safety of familiar bonds and feel supported.

For many, this comfort also came from appreciating and interacting with nature. One participant, Amy (15), contended that she could not have imagined surviving the earthquakes without her dogs. She found animals' atunement to nature, such as sensing earthquakes and aftershocks before they happened, to be comforting. She stated that spending time with the dogs and being out in nature were extremely important to her ability to cope, a sentiment similar to a participant in the Lancaster and Palframan (2009) study on spiritual coping that identified her pet dog as a source of spiritual support.

Other participants echoed this draw to be out in nature for the comfort of its stability and the grander perspective it offered. Moore (2015) cites the artist Georgia O'Keeffe as one who used nature to create her own personal 'religion'. O'Keefe stated "When I stand alone with the earth and sky a feeling of something in me going off in every direction into the unknown of infinity means more to me than any thing any organized religion gives me"(O'Keeffe et al., 1987, p. 263). This view of nature touches on the element of awe, which is often part of another form of connection – to something that is transcendent.

5.2.4 Transcendence

Transcendence is defined by both Seligman (2012) and Piedmont (1999) as that which connects you to something larger and more permanent than yourself while taking you out of the immediate circumstance of your life. The value of this definition lies in the action that allows the participants to experience a more expansive perspective during their recovery

after the earthquakes. All of the participants consciously acknowledged some aspect of transcendence in their narratives, except one, which I will discuss at the end of this section.

Deepening

Several participants suggested that they drew upon already existing spirituality to cope, experiencing a deepening of the ways in which they experienced transcendence. Two participants outlined prayer as an important aspect in their narratives, which helped them both become calm and focused – a type of prayer shown to have a positive effect after trauma such as a natural disaster (Harris et al., 2010). Several others made reference to meditation that intensified in some way, such as encountering new guides, receiving new information and insights, or creating a deeper state of awareness. One participant used the word "deepening" to describe the overall process of how she functioned in her coping post-earthquakes. She referred to how she consciously tended the depth of grief she held from the earthquakes combined with previous losses in her life. Oscillating out of those emotions, she felt an even stronger connection to her long-held beliefs around the value of being, instead of having material things. She emphasized the importance of the "spiritual depth" of looking inside and nurturing this inner life.

All of these deepened practices appeared to validate the participants' trust in the transcendent, whether that existed in religion or alternative spiritual pathways. This connection to the transcendent – whether it was defined theistically or otherwise – seemed to afford comfort, direction for action, and a sense of peace.

Self-Transcendent and Mystical

The literature describes a continuum of self-transcendent experiences, ranging from positive emotions such as awe, peace, and love, to mystical experiences (Yaden et al., 2017) (Van Cappellen et al., 2013). Two participants did recount mystical experiences, as denoted by William James' criteria of being difficult to describe, containing a noetic or deep truth, lasting temporarily, and not under their control (James, 1902/2004). Both participants felt these experiences were helpful to their coping – one indicating she felt she was being used as an instrument of God and, thus, contributing to the healing of those in Christchurch; and, the other suggesting that her ability to survive the intense losses she encountered, hinged on this mystical experience.

Others' experiences tended toward states of awe connected with nature. Two of the men in the study had opposing states of awe – one was intrigued and somewhat delighted by the power of Mother Nature, while the other felt humbled and helpless in the face of "something so much bigger than us". Their reactions aligned to their current level of openness to spirituality in that moment. The first went into the earthquakes with an existing spirituality that he perceived as strength, while the second developed a conscious connection to the transcendent after feeling this existential vulnerability.

Aside from the awe at the earth's physical movements during the earthquakes, many of the other participants described awe and gratitude in the face of nature as noted in previous sections. In this regard, this appreciation for nature aligns with aspects of Maslow's peak experiences (Maslow, 1970b) wherein being humbled as a small part of the cosmos provides comfort (Keltner & Haidt, 2003)**.** This turning to nature represented an instinctive and unquestioning certainty that nature would provide at different times, both solace and joy.

The Outlier

For one participant, Jane (3), there was no overt connection to, or consideration of, spirituality in her narrative. Of all the stories, hers used the most graphic language to convey the horror she felt after the earthquakes. Her tone and words were strong and combined with her dedicated work ethic as a business owner, it appeared she valued this stoic toughness. At the same time, however, her story also contained the most references to connections with people. While she did not speak of the spiritual or transcendent in any formal way, her emphasis on the people in her life was marked and suggests that connection also played some part of coping with the anguish of the earthquakes.

The importance of recognizing this exception amongst the sixteen participant narratives is that it represents a clear preference for problem-focused coping; that is, dealing with the cause of the stress. After the first major earthquake when the building which housed her business sustained the most damage, Jane's primary focus was to attend to the issues surrounding getting her business going as soon as possible. All of her energy, creativity, and network of relationships were called on in this practical task. The fact that family, friends, customers, and business associates featured prominently in her story, suggests an implicit value of social connections alongside a pragmatic acceptance of the situation. However, while these connections were important, they were tied to the meaning the business held

for Jane. As she stated, “It’s our life to do it, it’s our money, we need to get these businesses going...my livelihood, I had it all tied up in this.” For this participant, solving practical problems that threatened her business took primacy over transcendence in coping.

Overall, the common elements of acceptance, clarity and choice, connection, and transcendence, demonstrate the nature of how spirituality and meaning afforded a way of transcending the earthquake situation for the participants. In keeping with the definitions of spirituality and transcendence reviewed in the literature in Chapter 2, transcendent, rather than spiritual, may be the more inclusive word for this type of coping.

5.3 Transcendent Coping

The discussion so far has centred on the four common elements of acceptance, clarity and choice, connection, and transcendence that emerged from the participants’ narratives on their spiritual or meaningful experiences in coping with the earthquakes. The description of the elements has shown that they are not always distinct from each other, but, rather, intermingle and overlap. Whether individually or collectively, the function of these elements represents an additional type of transcendent coping that could be added to Folkman’s (1997) transactional model used to frame this research, which I will discuss below.

5.3.1 Transcendence in the Transactional Model of Coping

The results of this research suggest that transcendent coping employs acceptance, clarity and choice, connection, and transcendence, as everyday functions to access a perspective that is larger-than-the-self. It begins with the decision to accept the reality of a presenting stressful situation. This surrender during a significant challenge provides a momentary stillness – struggle, emotions, problem solving, all cease in a temporary state of abeyance. While this might appear as helpless giving up or emotional salving, it actually functions to restore energy that then engenders insight and action. The calm acceptance that invokes new or renewed clarity of self, leads to personally aligned choices and action, as well as connection to others, nature, animals, a sense of a higher self, or a higher being/consciousness/energy, and an expansive or transcendent perspective. Transcendent coping, therefore, can be seen as a similar, yet distinct, approach to other forms of coping in the transactional model.

To review, the transactional model of coping (Folkman, 1997) posits that people use the coping style that fits for the context of the stress they are experiencing. As referenced earlier, this model suggests there are three paths to coping: problem-focused, emotion-focused, and if those prove ineffective, meaning-focused.

It is within meaning-focused coping that spirituality has been considered in the model, as a way of reflecting values and beliefs usually connected with religion (Folkman, 2008; Gall et al., 2005)(Pargament, 2012; Park & Folkman, 1997; Park & George, 2013). However, I suggest that transcendent coping, which includes spirituality as a function not necessarily associated with religion, is a form of coping that can occur separately, while also sharing facets of, and enhancing, problem-, emotion- and meaning-focused approaches. For example, when the force of the earthquake was so destructive, several of the participants either found themselves in a mystical experience that descended upon them, or wilfully sought out transcendent experiences, both of which created a sense of equanimity. The comfort and calm from adopting a larger perspective in transcendent coping could be seen to share an emotion-focus in that it served to lessen feelings of shock, fear, anxiety, and grief. Other participants used the clarified values and beliefs that ensued from transcendent coping to guide them in making new life choices, such as pursuing more meaningful work. This overlaps with both problem-focused coping, by solving how to make money in the new post-earthquake reality; and meaning-focused coping, by connecting to work that is fulfilling. All of these ways of coping were enabled by, and infused with, elements from within transcendent coping, which drew power from having an expanded perspective.

Ultimately, transcendent coping allows a person to access a calming stability amidst the stress, which then allows them to better utilize the other forms of coping if needed. Once the participants in this study experienced a sense of equanimity from their transcendent coping, they were strengthened to confront post-earthquake challenges and if necessary, cope in other ways: by dealing with practical issues (problem-focused), experiencing their emotions (emotion-focused), and, find meaning in their situation (meaning-focused). A review of theories within psychology that explain how transcendent coping functions in this way, follows.

5.3.2 Theoretical Foundations of Transcendent Coping

The theories within Positive Psychology or its predecessors, Humanist and Transpersonal Psychology that explain the concept of transcendent coping are represented in the graphic below.

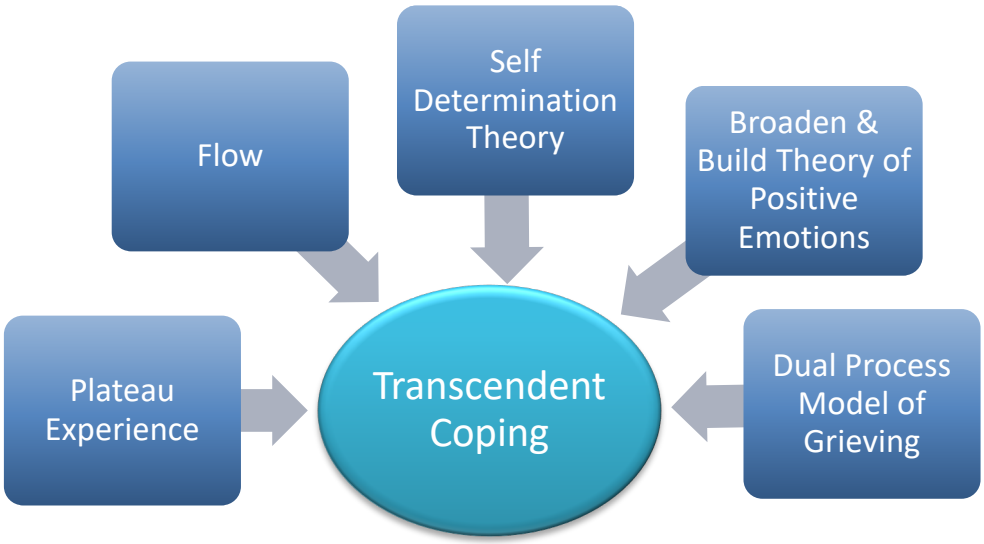

Figure 9: Theoretical Foundations of Transcendent Coping

In the 1970 new preface to his book on *Peak Experiences*, Abraham Maslow publicly discussed the lesser-known addition to his theories, which he called "plateau experiences" (Maslow, 1970b). He recognized a state that encompassed a longer lasting feeling of serenity and calmness that contrasted to the more vigorously felt peak experiences, and stated:

> *The high plateau-experience always has a noetic and cognitive element, which is not always true for peak experiences, which can be purely and exclusively emotional. It is far more voluntary than peak experiences are. One can learn to see in this Unitive way almost at will. It then becomes a witnessing, an appreciating, what one might call a serene, cognitive blissfulness which can, however, have a quality of casualness and of lounging about.(Maslow, 1970a, p. 11)*

This stilled state aligns with the element of acceptance and calmness identified in transcendent coping. In the shock of the earthquakes and the aftermath, the participants paused to absorb the new reality facing them. Being in this stillness allowed them to re-set – to just be and feel the emotions – good and bad. For most, this state of acceptance was not

a peak experience but a quiet dawning and moving forward into clarity and connection. Apart from a few distinct pivot point and mystical moments, this transcendent coping did not present as a dramatically different way of coping, but rather melded into the everyday life of the participants. The transcendence aspect is similar to the casual serenity that Maslow outlined in the above quote.

Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi's concept of Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008) describes a complete, un-self-conscious engagement with a task, or in this case, dealing with the surroundings and situation of the post-earthquake experience. While engrossed in this shocking circumstance and using the stillness to recalibrate, the participants were then able to connect to their own clarity of values, beliefs and understanding of the correct path of action for them. This clarity of thought and action, fortified with the comfort of connection, allowed them to approximate the flow state by mobilizing all of their abilities to engage in the coping process.

Inherent in both the flow and plateau experience is the person's openness to the positive state – a surrender of sorts. This volitional turn falls within the domain of self-determination theory that emphasizes meeting the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2008). The participants did meet these needs in transcendent coping by being empowered by the initial acceptance, choosing how to act in ways aligned to their own values, while also being connected to loved ones, community, nature, and so on. One participant captured the self-determination of this coping by using the analogy of being a pinball – swerving around and knocking against obstacles but always continuing to move forward. She met the challenges the earthquakes created by adapting and making choices that kept moving her toward her passion of having a full-time creative career. By surrendering to both the effort required to address post-earthquake obstacles, and the vision of and movement toward meaningful work, this participant engaged fully in the "pinball pathway" of staying true to her values.

Several others changed the direction of their work and personal life based on new or reaffirmed values. Transcendent coping uses intrinsic values to guide action, which aligns with Ryan and Deci (2008's) Self Determination Theory Model of Vitality in that they say

> *The pursuit of meaningful activities, especially those associated with intrinsic goals, maintains or enhances vitality. The activities do not simply relax the self-regulatory muscle; rather, they can satisfy*

> *psychological needs and thus rekindle the energies lost from the more depleting conditions.(Ryan & Deci, 2008, p. 713.)*

The increased vitality engendered by transcendent coping can be seen as an expansive flow on from positive emotions, as set forth by Fredrickson (2001) in the broaden-and-build theory. Participants experienced positive feelings such as freedom, safety, awe, love, gratitude, empowerment, courage and peace. Each of these feelings then engendered a positive state that allowed participants to expand into new creative responses or stronger positive emotions in the situation. For example, some participants felt emancipated, which created a sense of empowerment to make changes in their careers, living arrangements, and daily habits. Others felt awe in the face of nature, which in turn led to a feeling of security with their place in the cosmos. Many experienced gratitude for the caring and assistance from others, which then grew and evolved into a deeper connection to the community. The equanimity of transcendent coping broadened the participants' perspective of their life and allowed them to act in ways they may not have considered before.

Finally, the action of the elements within transcendent coping are similar to the Dual Process Model of Grieving (Schut, 1999) that describes the oscillation process of dealing with loss that many of the participants experienced. The focus on feeling the emotions is important in that it is not an action of being overcome by them or stifling them, but rather noticing and allowing them to surface. Feeling the emotions of grief (as well as fear and anger), and then oscillating out of them, encourages a healthy balancing of being in the moment with the emotion but then being free of it - a process that is ongoing until the heavy emotion eventually subsides. One participant used the analogy of a ladder for grieving, noting that it is an ongoing process where sometimes you are at the top of the ladder feeling strong but something triggers the grief and you drop down a rung or two. The relevance to transcendent coping is both in feeling the grief and other emotions as part of the acceptance, and the oscillation process overall.

Having a plateau experience, to use Maslow's word, or engaging with transcendence is not something that happens all the time. Rather, a person moves in and out of transcendent coping as needed, as it is not usual or necessary to remain in it constantly. In the next section, the braided river offers an apt analogy to demonstrate the ways all four coping

approaches - problem, emotion, meaning, and transcendent - may oscillate amongst each other in the coping process.

5.3.3 Braided River Model of Coping

With regard to the inevitability of stressors in life, Antonovsky (1990, p. 76) stated, “we are all, from the moment we are born, in the river”. Extending from this metaphor, the braided river, a particularly well-known feature in Canterbury, New Zealand, provides an analogy of how the different ways of coping weave together to strongly flow through and manage life stress. In this type of river, the water breaks out into separate channels around islands of deposited sediment. When rainfall is great, the water levels rise, washing away the gravel and merging the separate channels into one larger body of water. At these times of full strength, the oscillating water clears away the debris in the river, allowing the water to flow unimpeded - a river ‘reset’ as described by morphologists. Whether the river is broken into smaller channels during drought periods or runs wide and full-bodied, the water is always present to some degree, flowing from the mountains to the sea.

Figure 10: Waimakariri River, Canterbury, New Zealand (source: braided.rivers.org: Lower Waimakariri Bird Survey 2016)

The inherent drive within us to overcome obstacles can be seen as this continuous flow of water, streaming around minor life stressors characterized by the islands of sediment, during periods of relative calm. The separate channels of water represent different ways of coping by attending to emotions, problems, meaning, and/or transcendence as we manage our life stress. A major difficult event in our life, such as the earthquake sequence, may require us to utilize all of these channels of coping to form a full-strength approach to overcoming the

stress. When a braided river flows at full strength, the channels join, using the power of the water oscillating through the sediment to wash it away and refresh the river.

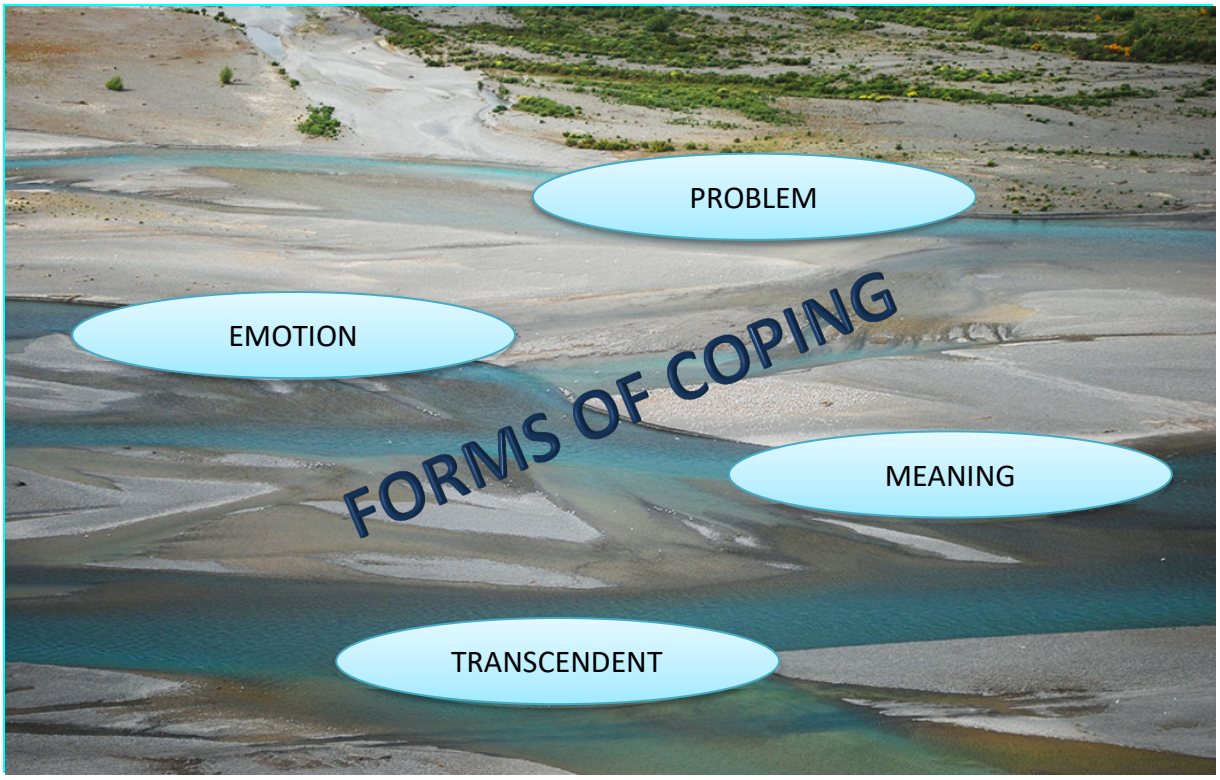

Figure 11: Braided River Model of Coping

For example, during and after the earthquakes in Canterbury, dealing with immediate safety and housing issues required a focus on solving those problems. Emotions that arose, such as fear and shock, followed by grief, as the full picture of the devastation became known, involved also focusing on tending these feelings. As the years of earthquakes continued and the long, slow process of restoring the city of Christchurch became apparent, many people turned to finding meaning to cope with this post-earthquake reality. Preceding and/or braided into these ways of coping was the calming benefit of adopting a larger perspective through transcendent coping. All, or just a few, of these coping approaches flowed as channels in the riverbed, sometimes separately, sometimes joining together to flow concurrently, forming a braided river of coping.

The elements within transcendent coping function in a similar manner. They suggest an inner strength present within a person that may not always flow strongly or consciously until extraordinary circumstances call it forth. When formidable stress occurs or several stressors accumulate, some people activate transcendent coping – a personal reset. It begins with **acceptance** of a difficult life challenge by becoming still, letting the emotions in the situation

flow so as not to stagnate, thus surrendering to the stress but not being overcome by it. Alongside the opening is a **clarity** that dawns, focusing attention on personal values, meaning and direction that leads to congruent **choices** and action. Interwoven alongside is the **connection** to those and that who are significant, providing comfort and solace. Finally, **transcendence** via whatever form is most natural such as religion, alternative spirituality, nature, love of family, friends, community and so on, provides an expanded perspective that brings a sense of peace. Together or apart, these elements flow in and around each other and the stressor, creating a flexible and embodied ability to cope during a presenting stressful situation. The possible interaction of transcendent coping on the other ways of coping is to provide a base of calm equanimity thus allowing more energy and strength for the overall coping process.

Whether considering the different focuses of coping, or the elements within transcendent coping, the braided river model of coping suggests a dynamic, multi-channel concept of managing life stress.

5.4 Implications

This research used narrative inquiry to explore the possible role of spirituality within coping during the prolonged stress presented by the Canterbury earthquake sequence. Kim (2015) underlines the important role that narrative inquiry can play in research by suggesting that stories offer, "a beginning point to understand, analyse, evaluate, and theorize the human and social phenomenon" (Kim, 2015, p. 237). The findings, drawn from the sixteen participants' stories, have implications for stress and coping theory and the study of spirituality; counselling and community practice in natural disaster recovery; and in suggesting the recognition of spirituality as a resource for wellbeing.

5.4.1 Theory

The original framework for this research resided within the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping updated by Folkman (1997). Transcendent coping is different from the emotion-, problem- and meaning-focused types of coping set out in the revised model. It does have similarities to all of these forms of coping and may in fact co-exist within them. Certainly, feeling the emotions as part of acceptance, pursuing congruent forms of action, and finding meaning are shared aspects difficult to separate out as a distinct coping type. However, this research suggests transcendent coping is an additional approach that enhances the other

forms of coping by creating a base of equanimity, which serves to strengthen coping overall. The expanded perspective or consciousness of transcendent coping creates a stillness that invigorates a person to then find creative solutions, experience positive emotions, and/or, connect to meaning.

As discussed in the literature review, Gall et al. (2005) extended the transactional model by conceptualizing a spiritual framework for coping and health. Their framework suggests that a spiritual appraisal occurs at the beginning of a stressful situation and happens recursively throughout the coping process. Transcendent coping shares the recursive nature of this framework but differs in that it is not primarily a spiritual/religious appraisal. Rather, transcendent coping is a process of stilling and opening to transcendence that occurs both before and alongside the appraisals within the other types of coping. For some, releasing old ways of viewing the self and the world is part of transcendent coping.

Spirituality in Psychology Research

Few studies consider spirituality separately from religion as the approach adopted in this research has done. The value placed on spirituality or wairua (in Te Reo Maori) is not traditionally upheld within western scientific psychology but is central to indigenous psychology as stated by Valentine, Tassell-Mataamua, and Flett (2017). They lament the discomfort between the predominantly materialist focus in western psychology with the experiential nature of spiritualty, often characterized by ineffability and immateriality (Valentine et al., 2017, p. 69.). Grof (2019) with his focus on transpersonal psychology, and Walach (2017) who champions the study of secular spirituality, also underscore the tendency within research to dismiss spirituality as a topic worthy of study.

However, spirituality and psychology can be seen as an emerging field, suggests Miller (2012) in the *Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality*. In her introduction, she described the eagerness of tertiary students for this topic as demonstrated by the standing room only attendance on a Friday night at the Columbia University presentations by faculty featured in the handbook (Miller, 2012, p. 3). Her anecdote is perhaps a reflection of the growing number of people, as mentioned previously, who indicate belief in something 'greater than themselves' but not necessarily religious. The popular public reception of scholars such as Sam Harris, a neurologist who explores secular spirituality (Harris, 2014), also points to growing interest.

The power of public attention has spurred contemporary psychology to try to overcome its historical discomfort with the hard to define and analyze concept of spirituality as separate from religion. This is evidenced by the inclusion of transcendence and spirituality in the Values in Action Character Strengths Inventory; and, the creation of the Varieties Corpus at Penn State University's Positive Psychology lab devoted to amassing and scientifically studying spiritual experiences. Both of these examples demonstrate a recognition of the importance of spirituality but maintain a positivist approach to gaining that knowledge. The value my research brings is the clarity and understanding of the nature of spirituality as a complex and personal way of knowing, explored through an epistemological lens that focuses on the personal and qualitative. This interpretivist exploration provides a beginning sense of how psychology may consider secular spirituality within coping and flourishing and contributes to the body of work recognizing spirituality as worthy of scholarly attention.

5.4.2 Practice

The act of even asking this research question and offering sixteen people the chance to talk about their spiritual or meaningful experiences after the earthquakes proved to be beneficial for them. Most of the interviews started with a formal handshake and ended with a hug - indicating the value of speaking about their earthquake experience even five years afterward and being able to safely and freely discuss spiritual and meaningful things. Using minimally directed interviews offered a non-threatening way for people to process their experience and increase self-understanding in a story-like manner. Narrative is frequently used in education research and can be a valuable tool in clinical counselling which Guo et al. (2013) suggest could work well with adolescents. While the participants in my study were all aged over thirty, it is likely that creating a safe and encouraging environment for young people within schools or counselling, to write, speak, or act out their own stories of transcendent experiences, could also be of benefit to their coping ability.

Rob Fergusson, a minister for the Anglican Church whose work happened on the streets of downtown Christchurch instead of the physical church after the earthquakes, also used non-religious ways to broach spirituality. One question he used to engage people in connecting to their own version of transcendence was to ask them "where do you go to refresh your spirit**"** (personal conversation, October 7, 2017). Interestingly, he stated that no one ever took umbrage at the question and could easily answer it. Moore (2015) also considers the implicitness of spirituality (or what he calls a religion of one's own) when using the example

of his uncle and others who “live and act in a certain way…I call them mystics because they have found a portal to transcendence, though they use no formal spiritual or theological language” (Moore, 2015, p. 52).

While much research on spirituality resides in the health sector, particularly in nursing, clinical counselling does pay heed to this important aspect of human life. The challenge can often be how to touch on spirituality outside the framework of religion. Using the term transcendence avoids possible negative connotations to both religion and spirituality and makes it more accessible to many people. Cook (2013) considers transcendence in psychiatry and suggests that even asking clients about the things that matter most to their life, which often involve people dearest to them, is a spiritual approach. Transcendent coping elements commonly used in everyday life could be used in brief treatment therapy as a way of focusing clients on their own implicit spiritual coping. This could take the form of having clients recognize when they may have felt the freedom of acceptance or surrender in the past; what their goals and values are; who or what brings them comfort; and, how they “refresh their spirit” or have risen above difficult situations in the past.

The recognition for the need to harness spirituality for mental health in New Zealand is growing, as evidenced by the first ever Symposium on Spirituality and Mental Health, hosted by the University of Otago Medical School in Wellington in November 2019. The overwhelming response surprised organizers as they received forty applications for eighteen presentation spots from presenters throughout New Zealand, and had to turn people away after reaching a registration cap of 160. This enthusiastic response indicates a desire for further research and collaboration on the use of spirituality as a tool for addressing mental health issues, which practitioners and researchers are actively pursuing.

5.4.3 Community Wellbeing

Christchurch has endured several unexpected and traumatic events since 2010. This research has focused on the aftermath of the 2010/11 earthquake sequence but since that time, several other serious events have affected the region. In 2016, a major earthquake struck Kaikoura, a coastal town two hundred kilometres north of Christchurch, resulting in landslides that cut off access to the community and main roads stretching north from Christchurch across the northern part of the South Island. In 2017, wildfires raged in the Port Hills of Christchurch for several months causing devastating destruction to homes and the

natural environment. On March 15, 2019, a mass shooting at two of the city's mosques shocked Christchurch. These incidents have challenged the mental health of entire communities, requiring the government to create public initiatives aimed at helping people cope and recover.

To support Cantabrians after the earthquakes, the Canterbury District Health Board and the Mental Health Foundation developed the All Right? Campaign based on wellbeing research in the United Kingdom (D'Aeth, 2014). It consisted of messages posted in various formats such as posters, bookmarks, and postcards, which were then distributed widely throughout the city. This campaign became prominent once again after the gun attacks on the two mosques in Christchurch on March 15, 2019 that resulted in 51 deaths. Reinforced to be as inclusive as possible, the campaign was reproduced in several languages and displayed throughout Christchurch and area (see Figure 12 and Figure 13 below).

Figure 12: All Right? Campaign postcards

Figure 13: All Right? Campaign Posters

The latest 2018 evaluation report of the All Right? campaign supported strength-based living by stating that "Improving the health and wellbeing of the population takes a cross-sector, whole-of-community approach and is not just the responsibility of healthcare services. Investing more in strengths-based approaches can positively contribute to improving population wellbeing" *(*https://allright.org.nz/articles/wellbeing-promotion-benefiting-mental-health-service-users/).

The elements within transcendent coping echo the content of both iterations of the All Right? campaign and the emphasis on strength-based living. It is not clear if the participants in my study were influenced by the campaign messages, but their experiences of transcendent coping reflect the aim of the public health initiative. The postcards emphasizing being in the moment and accepting the varied feelings correspond to the participants' willingness to be still, experience their emotions (especially grief), and live with intentionality and presence. The participants connected to their families, community, pets, and nature aligning to the messages about showing love and catching up with friends. The experience of self-transcendence demonstrated by the participants' varied connections with nature, the cosmos, God, and 'energy' reflect the postcard image asking, "when was your last moment of wonder?", whose subtitle reads "sometimes the quietest moments can

really change our perspective". Transcendent coping involves just that shift to a broader perspective. Bringing transcendence or spirituality into everyday actions such as was being encouraged in the All Right? campaign, as well as empirical research – such as this study – can be used to help connect people to implicit spirituality in a practical and useful way.

Starting with school-aged children is a first step in developing transcendent coping abilities early on. In one example, Jamieson (2015) carried out a research project on the implementation of a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction for Children (MBSR-C) programme in a Christchurch school with many children who had been affected by the earthquakes. The programme sought to incorporate aspects of M$\bar{a}$ori spirituality through mindfulness, which sees spirituality as an integral part of life. Kabat-Zinn (2006), one voice of many in the decades long work and implementation of using mindfulness for wellbeing, defines the concept as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (p. 145). This intentional way of being relates to facets of acceptance in the participants' experiences of transcendent coping, and would merit being embedded into curricula at all education levels, including tertiary.

Beyond the local Christchurch setting, the current New Zealand government has indicated an unprecedented support of wellbeing with the introduction of their Wellbeing Budget in 2019 (Government of New Zealand, 2019)**.** The wellbeing focus considers several issues relating to mental health including meeting people's needs early before they develop mental illness and confronting the high incidence of suicide. Encouraging the transcendent in people's coping can help in addressing these challenges. With respect to the field of addictions, Mate (2017) suggests addictions and suicide have everything to do with a person's spirituality and are indicative of alienation from the self. All of the elements of transcendent coping could act as antidote to this alienated state, starting with connection, and expanding into the stillness of acceptance and feeling emotions, to recognizing personal values and goals that could offer hope, and the opening to the transcendent state that helps one see the larger picture, not just the current pain.

5.5 Limitations and Future Research

As reflected previously, spirituality can be a delicate and difficult to investigate subject in both research and everyday life. Recruitment required sensitivity to language to encourage

responses and mitigate wariness of spirituality (often perceived as religious) in highly secular New Zealand. This made the framing of the research question quite open and, upon analysis, challenging to categorise the data. However, for this exploratory research a non-directive approach was preferable to working with a priori themes. Future research might involve a more defined approach to transcendent coping by framing a specific definition of spirituality or transcendence to accommodate secular spirituality. With a larger research team, a broader sample could be used to analyse spiritual and meaningful experiences according to pre-established themes of acceptance, clarity, connection and transcendence. A replication of research done in Birmingham by Hay and Morisy (1985) which used surveys and follow up interviews, could act as a model to expand the empirical research.

While sixteen participants is considered large for thematic analysis, it is not sufficient to allow generalization; a common occurrence in qualitative research. Additionally, the older age, primarily female gender, and mostly European ethnicity of the participants, did not offer a wide spectrum of experience. Since younger people featured prominently in the post-earthquake clean up in Christchurch, research aimed at considering young people's perspectives on how spirituality is involved, or not, in coping would be a valuable undertaking. Exploring the element of connection for association to suicide prevention in youth might also be a significant future area for study. Research that invites young people to consider their own stories of significant, spiritual or meaningful experiences during challenging times in their lives would be beneficial to them as participants and yield more information on the role of transcendent coping.

Finally, presenting data in narrative vignettes based on interviews does have its own limitations. The challenge in obtaining people's stories is both the definition of story, and then the reinterpretation of that story by the researcher. It is a delicate balance suited to a delicate subject but also raises the question of utility. Part of the value of this research is the ongoing consideration and discussion it encourages and, hopefully, the increased clarity over the nature of spirituality that it has provided. The purpose of the study was not to definitively prove any particular theory but to wonder whether spirituality, be that explicit or implied, was involved in coping after trauma such as the Canterbury earthquakes and if so, how it presented. An important role of this research is to encourage ongoing questioning and consideration of transcendent coping as a viable option in post-trauma coping.

5.6 Summary

This discussion chapter firstly acknowledged the difficulty that often arises when speaking and writing about spirituality. This extended to the reluctance within research to consider spirituality as separate from religion, to my own discomfort at times during the research, to that of the participants who sometimes struggled with the language. Nonetheless, many of the participants linked their spirituality to a legacy from their parents and grandparents that provided a legitimizing effect in the face of being interviewed about experiences not necessarily within a traditional religious framework.

I next synthesized the four core elements of acceptance, clarity of thought and action, connection, and transcendence with their function within coping after the earthquakes. These elements afforded the participants a stillness and relief from struggle while also experiencing grief and other emotions; an alignment to their own values and beliefs that was empowering; the comfort and safety of connections with loved ones, the community, pets and nature; and, the peaceful equanimity of holding a transcendent view of their circumstances. These practices were not necessarily tied to extreme or dramatic spiritual events but rather, to mundane everyday activities such as being in nature, spending time with pets, talking to friends, or working in jobs that were meaningful. Theories within humanistic, transpersonal and positive psychology informed the concept of transcendent coping and helped indicate its relationship to established concepts.

The braided river acts as an analogy illustrating how the different ways of coping, and the elements within transcendent coping, can operate separately or together to form a comprehensive approach for dealing with major stress. The coping types are similar to the separate channels in a braided river that flow around deposits of gravel (stress). When the river resets itself during a time of full-on water flow, the channels oscillate forcefully around and through the gravel islands, clearing out the stream to form a full-bodied river. This is akin to the participants using some or all of the ways of coping, including the elements within transcendent coping, to overcome the stress of the earthquakes.

Implications for transcendent coping lie within its addition to the stress and coping theory– suggesting that transcendent coping may coexist with and support other types of coping - i.e. problem-, emotion-, and meaning-focused approaches. This research also contributed to

the validity of spirituality as a worthy area of research by demonstrating its value to both clinical practice and community wellbeing.

Finally, the qualitative thematic analysis carried out in this research presented its own challenges. Sixteen participants did not allow for greater generalization and yet was a large number for a thematic analysis. When viewed as an exploratory study intent on opening up the question around spirituality in coping, this research successfully contributes to the consideration of this potentially important part of our human nature.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

"To the mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders."

Lao Tzu

From the cracking of the earth to the stillness of transcendence, this research has been instructed by sixteen participants' stories of spiritual and meaningful experiences within coping after the 2010/11 Canterbury earthquake sequence in New Zealand. A phenomenological inquiry revealed four common elements amongst the participants' interview experiences that helped them cope and recover. Acceptance, clarity and choice, connection, and transcendence formed the basis of Transcendent Coping, which was guided by theories within humanistic, transpersonal and positive psychology.

Transcendent coping is an addition to the transactional model of stress and coping (Folkman, 1997) which was used as an initial framework to explore the role of spirituality in post-disaster coping. It consists of acceptance as an opening and stilling element, which allowed the participants to pause and simply be in their experience. Clarity of self then engendered aligned choices and action based on clear values, beliefs and personal meaning. Connections to people, the community, nature, pets, and God or a Higher Power/Energy for some, permeated all of the participants' stories. The fourth element of transcendence involved experiencing the peace and comfort of a larger perspective that offered lasting strength, serving to enrich other forms of coping.

The interesting and encouraging feature of transcendent coping is its mundane nature. It was characterized by everyday experiences such as slowing down to be present in the moment; having flashes of insight; enjoying nature and connecting with friends, family, and pets; and, experiencing peace in meditation, prayer or quiet moments. The addition of transcendent coping to theory fills a gap in our understanding of how people cope with difficult situations, as well as enjoy a flourishing life. Transcending immediate circumstances allows for the experience of an expanded perspective, which provides a base of equanimity

to then cope in other ways, or generally, live well. Without this base of calmness, other ways of coping and even, flourishing, will not be as effective.

Transcendent coping, combined with emotion-, problem-, and meaning-focused coping, could be seen to function in a manner similar to that of a braided river, a geological formation particularly pertinent to Canterbury, New Zealand. All of the ways of coping are represented in each of the separate channels in a braided river that come together at times of full-on water flow, washing away gravel islands in the riverbed, and creating an oscillating power cleanse to reset the river. In this same way, the various coping methods weave in and out of use in dynamic response to the needs of a stressful situation, creating a comprehensive approach to coping.

This exploration of spirituality within coping after trauma, such as the earthquakes in Canterbury, contributes to the recognition of spirituality as a valid area of study. Looking qualitatively into people's experiences adds to the scholarly knowledge of spirituality and its role in coping in our complex and often challenging world, while also developing accessible language around this important aspect of human nature.

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Appendix A

Research Invitation Letter

Faculty of Environment, Society and Design

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Susan Young
Department of Tourism, Sport and Society
Faculty of Environment, Society and Design

March 30, 2017

RE: Voluntary participation in a research project at Lincoln University

Hello,

The earthquakes that occurred in Canterbury from 4 September 2010 to December 2011, and around Kaiapoi in November 2016, were significant to people living in the area. The recovery process has required people to make sense of what has happened and decide how they can move forward. This research is interested in finding out people's answer to the following question:

> "During the earthquakes or afterward, did you have a personal spiritual experience? What this means is up to you and does not need to be religious. It might involve an awareness of a higher power or presence, a sense of connection to humanity, a closeness to nature, or feeling 'at one with the universe'. "

If you answered yes, I would love to hear from you to learn more about your experience. Please read the enclosed Research Information Sheet for more information and contact me at your soonest convenience.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to speaking with you if you feel you meet the above requirements.

Kind regards,

Susan Young

Appendix B- Research Information Sheet

Research Information Sheet

I would like to invite you to participate in a PhD research project at Lincoln University.

What is the aim of this project?

The aim of this project is to find out what personally meaningful or spiritual experiences people may have had during or after the earthquakes beginning on 4 September 2010, and understand how these experiences may have affected people's recovery. This research will provide insight into coping after a trauma and/or disaster such as the Canterbury earthquakes, and hopefully, will assist others who find themselves in similar circumstances.

What types of participants are being sought?

I am looking for adults over the age of 18 years who experienced some or all of the Canterbury Earthquake Sequence beginning 4 September 2010, and are willing to consider any personally meaningful or spiritual experiences they may have had during or since that time.

What will I be asked to do?

Your participation will involve agreeing to being interviewed about your experience. This interview will take place at a mutually convenient time and place chosen by you, ensuring privacy and confidentiality. With your permission, it will be recorded digitally or notes taken while we speak. The interview should take about one hour and be very much like a conversation between us about aspects of your experience.

What use will be made of my data?

The results of this research will be published as my PhD thesis and may also be presented at academic conferences and submitted for publication in academic journals.

Your identity and the contents of your interview will remain private. No one will have access to this information, other than me, my supervisors and the Human Ethics Committee in the event of an audit. To further ensure anonymity, consent forms and individual interview data will be seen only by me and will be stored in a secure physical location and in electronic form with secure password protection. Only aggregated data will be presented in any publications and no information will be reported in a way that might identify any individual participant.

Can I withdraw from the project?

You may decline to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time. You may also withdraw from the project, including withdrawing any information you have provided to

me, at any time up to **31 December 2017**. You can do this by contacting me (Susan Young) or my supervisors (Gary Steel or Kevin Moore) using the contact details set out below.

What if I have any questions?

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the project, please contact me or my supervisors - we would be happy to discuss any concerns you may have.

What do I do now?

If you would like to participate in this project, please contact me either by e-mail: susan.young@lincolnuni.ac.nz or phone: 022 364 1425. I hope to carry out the interviews from June to November, 2017.

If you do not wish to participate but know of someone else who might, please pass this information along to them.

Thank you!

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.

Appendix C- Participant Interview Guide

Personal Profile

Date: Interview Code #:
Gender: Age:
Address now:
During earthquakes:
Religious affiliation, if any:

Theme 1 – EQ Experience
The earthquake sequence that began in Feb 2010 has been very significant for most people living in the Christchurch area. Could you please tell me what stands out in your memory of your overall experience of any or all of the earthquakes?

Theme 2 – Coping Strategies
Could you please tell me about your experience dealing with the earthquakes?

- What did you do to cope: practical problem solving/tend to emotional/physical activity/social & relationships/deal with insurance & EQC?
- How did these coping activities change as time went along (or did they)?

Theme 3 – Personal Meaningful or Spiritual Experience (M/SE)
Could you please tell me about your M/SE during the EQs and/or after?

- Where were you? What happened? How long did it last?
- Did you feel in control of the experience?
- How did you feel afterwards?
- Was this experience different from other religious or spiritual experiences?
- Have you discussed it with anyone?
- Give 3 words that describe your experience.

Theme 4 – Recovery/Recommendations
Could you please tell me how you are doing now?

- How has your life changed since the earthquakes i.e. how you relate to others, deal with stress, respond to challenges, etc.?
- How did or does your M/SE relate to helping you recover from the EQ's?
- Has this M/SE left any lasting impressions on you and in your life? Explain.
- What recommendations would you make to other people coping in similar situations?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?